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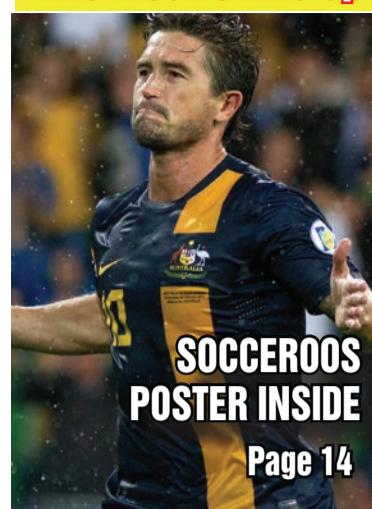
This Week's Line Up

\$5

goal! weekly

A-League Round 23 Friday 2nd Mar - Sunday 4th Mar 2012

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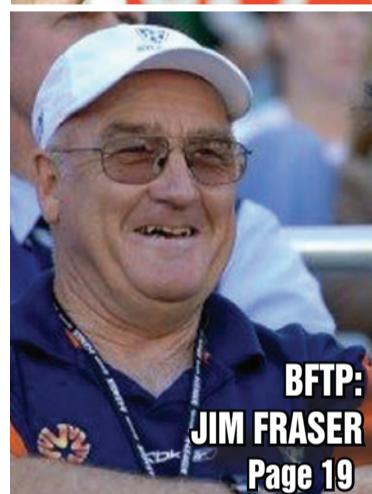


A-LEAGUE LICENCE REVOKED

PHOTO: ADRIAN GAGLIONE



GOLD COAST SILENCED!



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3 MINUTE BLITZ SINKS RIJKAARD'S SAUDIS



Three goals in three minutes from Australia gave the Socceroos a 4-2 win over Saudi Arabia which eliminates the Green Falcons from the World Cup.

The game was played at a fast pace and the first chance came on three minutes for the Socceroos. James Troisi found Brett Emerton who headed back to Harry Kewell to tap home but the referee ruled it out correctly for offside.

After a couple minor chances and a great percent of possession the Saudi's opened the scoring on 19 minutes thanks to a great strike by Salem Mohammed Aldawsari. The Al Hilal midfielder ran at the Australian defence beating Mark Milligan before finishing brilliantly into the bottom corner.

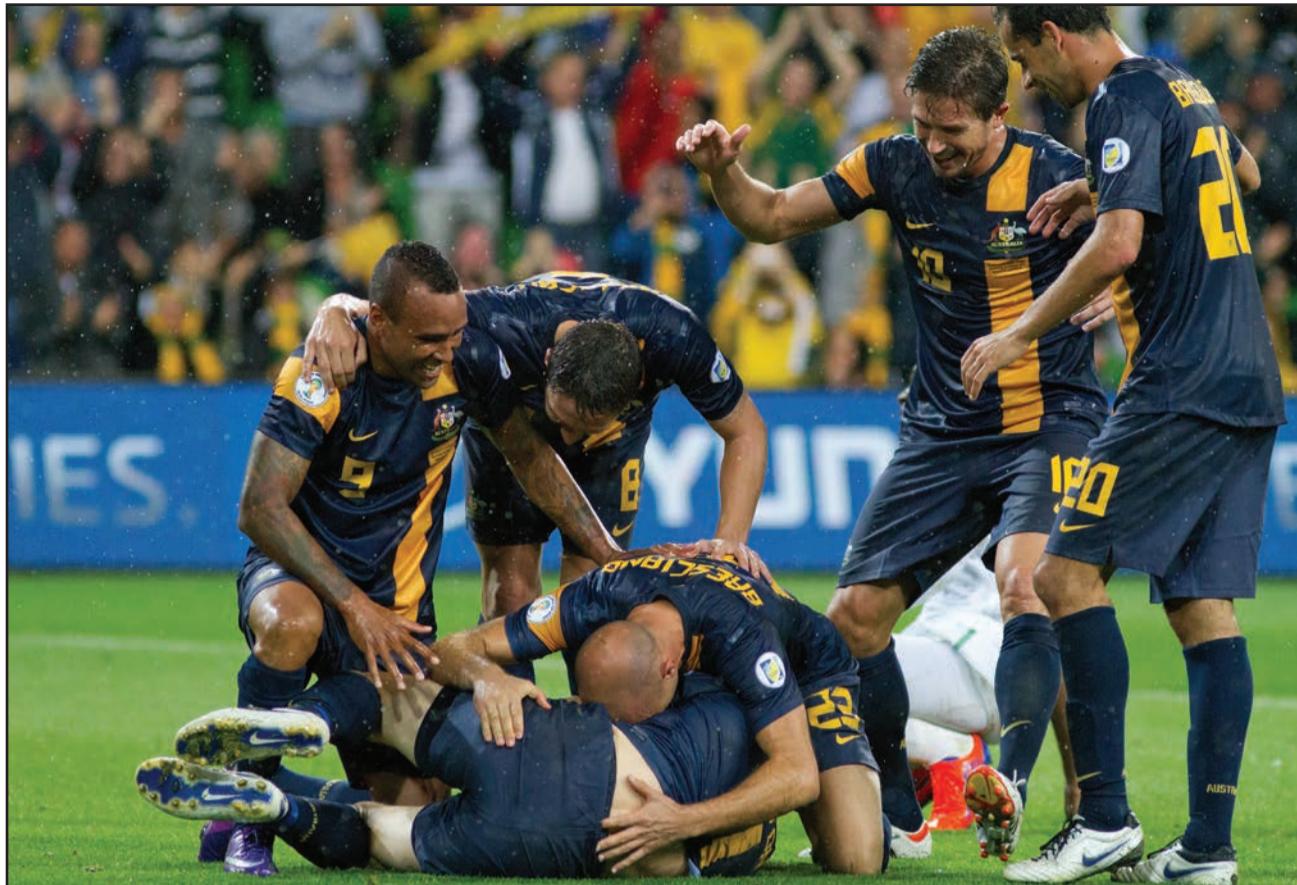
Three minutes later Australia were looking for an equaliser and after Harry Kewell played in Alex Brosque the Shimizu forward put his effort into the side netting.

Kewell almost scored a great driven free-kick but his effort once again was deflected wide, the Saudi defence was doing quite well.

But two minutes before the break Brosque equalised for the hosts with a good poked finish.

Just when the Socceroos thought they were going into the break level the Saudi's took the lead in stoppage time. After Milligan failed to track Nassir Ali Alshamrani the 28-year-old finished into the bottom corner from Hassan Muath Fallatah's low cross.

In the opening minutes of the second-half both sides had chances through



At a wet AAMI Park the Socceroos withstood a lively Saudi Arabia to finish top of their group comfortably. Photo: ANITA MILAS

Troisi, Kewell for Australia and Mohammed Bandar Alshalhoub for the visitors.

Australia on 60 minutes thought they took the lead when Lucas Neill's header from Matthew Spiranovic's cross squeezed through Waleed Abdullah Ali in goals. However the referee incorrectly ruled it out for offside. That would have been the Australian Captain's first goal for his country in 80 appearances.

The Green Falcons had a huge chance

to finish it off with Fallatah continuing to cause damage on the right flank and he laid a ball on the plate for an on rushing Alshamrani but his effort was poked wide.

That miss would haunt the Green Falcons when one minute later Australia equalised. Substitute Archie Thompson found Brosque on the left flank that crossed for an on rushing Kewell to finish in the bottom corner.

Two minutes later Australia remarkably took the lead when Emerton played a

great ball right onto the head of an unmarked Brosque who headed home.

Immediately from the kick-off, Australia scored their third goal in three minutes when Bresciano played a lovely ball for Emerton. However Kamil Sadig Almousa reached the ball first but accidentally played the ball off Emerton before the ball flew into the net.

In stoppage time substitute Naid Ahmed Hazazi almost got one back but his effort was well saved by Mark Schwarzer who didn't have much to do

all game.

So Australia finish top of the group on 15 points from a possible 18 and with Oman's 2-0 defeat of Thailand the Omani's go through in second with 8 points.

Group D Standings

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Australia	6	5	0	1	13	5	8	15
Oman	6	2	2	2	3	6	-3	8
Saudi Arabia	6	1	3	2	6	7	-1	6
Thailand	6	1	1	4	4	8	-4	4

Match Details

Wednesday 29 February 2012
 Australia 4 (Brosque 43', 75', Kewell 73', Emerton 76')
 Saudi Arabia 2 (Aldawsari 19', Alshamrani 45+2)
 Venue: AAMI Park
 Referee: KIM Dong Jin
 Attendance: 24,214

Australia: 1 Mark Schwarzer, 2 Lucas Neill, 4 Matthew Spiranovic, (3 David Carney 82'), 5 Jade North, 6 Sasha Ognenovski, 7 Brett Emerton, 8 Mark Milligan, 10 Harry Kewell, 11 James Troisi (9 Archie Thompson 63'), 20 Alex Brosque (16 Nick Carle 87'), 23 Marco Bresciano.

Yellow cards: Nil
 Red cards: Nil

Saudi Arabia: 1 Waleed Abdullah Ali, 3 Osama Abdulzag Hawaswi, 4 Abdulla Mohammed Aldossary, 7 Kamil Saddiq Almousa, 10 Mohammed Bandar Al Shalhoub (9 Naif Ahmed Hazazi 79'), 11 Nassir Ali Al Shahrani (Yasser Saeed Al Qahtani 72'), 12 Hassan Muath Fallatah, 14 Saud Ali Khariri, 15 Ahmed Mohamed Alfraidi (6 Ahmed Inrahin Ateeq 66'), 17 Taiseer Jaber Al Jassam, 19 Salem Mohammed Aldawsari.

Yellow cards: 14 Saud Ali Khariri 62', 11 Nassir Ali Al Shahrani 64'
 Red cards: Nil

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FFA TERMINATES PALMER LICENCE

All efforts to be made to field team to complete the season

Football Federation Australia (FFA) announced it had issued Gold Coast United FC Pty Ltd with a notice of termination following material breaches of the Club Participation Agreement that governs the conduct of all clubs in the Hyundai A-League.

The termination has been made following at least three clear breaches of the Agreement in recent days, namely:

1. A conscious and deliberate contravention of FFA Policies and Procedures.

2. Deliberate defiance of a direction that was given by FFA; and

3. Repeated public statements made by or on behalf of Gold Coast United that bring the A-League, FFA and the game of football into disrepute and are prejudicial to the interests of FFA, the A-League and the game of football in Australia.

Gold Coast United committed material breaches last Saturday night at Skilled Stadium when the playing strip and the stadium signage featured an unapproved slogan, in deliberate contravention of a direction from FFA.



Gold Coast United faced the wrath of the FFA after bringing the game into disrepute.

FFA Chairman Frank Lowy AC today expressed his profound disappointment that FFA had been left with no alternative than to terminate the Gold Coast United's licence.

"The material breach on Saturday night was followed by a statement from the club that it intended to continue using the slogan," said Mr Lowy.

"This behavior came on top of public comments that displayed a total lack of respect for football and the millions of Australians who love the game."

"Such disrespectful behavior, a flagrant disregard for the rules and a stated intent to continue breaking the rules made for an intolerable situation."

"As custodians of the game, we had to act to protect the integrity of the Hyundai A-League on behalf of the other nine clubs, players, coaches and most importantly, the fans."

During the past four weeks Gold Coast United has on several occasions expressed to FFA its strong intention to leave the competition but

during the same period issued contradictory statements that it intends to remain in the competition while at the same time continuing to breach FFA policies.

FFA has exhausted attempts with the owner of Gold Coast United to facilitate an orderly process under which the club could complete its remaining fixtures in the 2011/12 Hyundai A-League season and comply with its obligations under the Club Participation Agreement.

Mr Lowy made repeated attempts this morning to talk directly with Mr Palmer to appeal to him to allow a smooth completion of the season and a dignified exit from the game for Mr Palmer. These calls went unanswered.

FFA's priority now is to explore all options to field a Gold Coast team for the remaining four matches of its season. This would avoid any impact on the standing of the remaining nine clubs and be the fairest outcome for the competition, clubs, players and fans.

Mr Lowy appealed to the football community, including owners of the other nine clubs, to use whatever influence possible to encourage Mr Palmer to allow a smooth and fair outcome to the season.

"FFA will exhaust every practical option to have Gold Coast finish the season," he said.

FFA CEO Ben Buckley said all practical steps to enable a Gold Coast team to complete the season would be explored, including:

- Talking directly with Gold Coast players to encourage them to enter into arrangements with FFA to play the final four games of the season.
- FFA to pay the players for appearing in these games.
- Possible postponement of Sunday's scheduled match between Gold Coast and Wellington Phoenix.

"If we need extra time to put in place the necessary arrangements then we will consider postponing the match," he said.

A-League General Manager Lyall Gorman is already on the Gold Coast to talk with players and make arrangements for the season to continue unimpeded.

"The players are just one of the many innocent victims in all this and FFA will do its best to enable them to see out their playing season on the pitch."

"They deserve that opportunity at the very least," Mr Buckley said.

Government Must Investigate FFA: Palmer



Clive Palmer calls for Government intervention for the HAL.

Ministration which had also blown \$46 million of taxpayers' money with a failed bid to host the World Cup which attracted just one vote.

"Frank Lowy is an institution in Australian sport but judging by this decision he might be visiting a different kind of institution," he said.

"He has brought the game into disrepute. The sport should not be run by dictators like him."

Mr Palmer said the recent federal government review of football by Australian Sports Commission chief Warwick Smith failed to point out the biggest problem facing the code – its administration.

SCOREBOARD

TABLE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1 Central Coast Mariners	23	13	5	5	36	21	15	44
2 Brisbane Roar	23	12	5	6	44	24	20	41
3 Wellington Phoenix	23	11	3	9	30	26	4	36
4 Perth Glory	23	10	4	9	33	30	3	34
5 Melbourne Heart	23	9	6	8	30	29	1	33
6 Newcastle Jets	23	9	4	10	31	34	-3	31
7 Sydney FC	23	8	6	9	30	37	-7	30
8 Melbourne Victory	23	5	11	7	29	35	-6	26
9 Adelaide United	23	5	8	10	24	39	-15	23
10 Gold Coast United	23	3	8	12	25	37	-12	17

THIS WEEK

Week 24	Fixture	Venue	Local	AEDT
Thu 1 Mar 2012	Adelaide United v Perth Glory	Hindmarsh Stadium	7:30pm	8:00pm
Fri 2 Mar 2012	Brisbane Roar v Melbourne Heart	Suncorp Stadium	7:00pm	8:00pm
Sat 3 Mar 2012	Melbourne Victory v Newcastle Jets	AAMI Park	5:30pm	5:30pm
Sat 3 Mar 2012	Central Coast Mariners v Sydney FC	Bluetongue Stadium	7:45pm	7:45pm
Sun 4 Mar 2012	Wellington Phoenix v Gold Coast United	Westpac Stadium	4:30pm	2:30pm

NEXT WEEK

Week 25	Fixture	Venue	Local	AEDT
Fri 9 Mar 2012	Newcastle Jets v Gold Coast United	Ausgrid Stadium	8:00pm	8:00pm
Sat 10 Mar 2012	Melbourne Heart v Wellington Phoenix	AAMI Park	5:30pm	5:30pm
Sat 10 Mar 2012	Sydney FC v Melbourne Victory	Sydney Football Stadium	7:45pm	7:45pm
Sun 11 Mar 2012	Brisbane Roar v Adelaide United	Suncorp Stadium	4:00pm	5:00pm
Sun 11 Mar 2012	Perth Glory v Central Coast Mariners	nib Stadium	4:30pm	7:30pm

ROUND 23 RESULTS

Newcastle Jets 1

(Elrich 39)

Adelaide United 0

Crowd 10,383 at Hunter Stadium

Sydney FC 0

Wellington 1 (Ifill 13)

Crowd 10,165 at Sydney Football Stadium

Perth Glory 0

Brisbane Roar 3

(Henrique '21, Berisha '59, '63)

Crowd: 10,367 at nib Stadium

TOP GOAL SCORERS

17 - Besart Berisha (Roar)

9 - Shane Smeltz (Glory), Jeremy Brockie (Jets)

8 - Ryan Griffiths (Jets), Carlos Hernandez (Victory),

7 - Bruno Cazarine (SFC), Matt Simon (Mariners), Archie Thompson (Victory), Harry Kewell (Victory), Mitch Nichols (Roar),



Carlos Hernandez scored a sweet strike in Victory's 1-1 draw with Gold Coast to move up the charts

A-LEAGUE TEAM OF THE WEEK ROUND 23

Compiled by Steven Talevski



GK: Mark Paston – The Wellington number one was kept bust by the Sydney attack this weekend but was able to keep a clean sheet by denying Bruno Cazarine a number of times.

RB: Ivan Franjic – The Brisbane Roar fullback was an important part of a comfortable three nil victory over Perth Glory as he kept Mile Sterjovski busy in the defensive third while also making him quite in the Glory front third.

CB: Andrew Durante – Durante has had a fantastic season to date and his performance on the weekend was another typical display as he stood strong in the centre of defence for the Phoenix in a one nil victory over Sydney FC.

CB: Ben Sigmund – Sigmund's partnership with fellow central defender Andrew Durante and goalkeeper Mark Paston proved to be a solid rock against a Sydney FC who put everything into their attack but could not find a goal.

LB: Tarek Elrich – The twenty-five year old defender all but ended Adelaide United's finals chances as he snuck up in the Jets attacking penalty area to slot in the game's only goal.

RM: Brett Emerton – Emerton was a dangerous threat against the Phoenix by supplying Bruno Cazarine a number of chances that he was unable to put in the back of the net.

LM: Massimo Murdocca – Brisbane Roar's only foundation player once again had a great game in the midfield despite only arriving a few hours before the game after the birth of his first child.

CM: Carlos Hernandez – The Costa Rican international scored Melbourne Victory's equaliser with a stunning right foot strike in the one all draw against Gold Coast United.

LF: Francis Jeffers – The former Arsenal and Everton striker had a great game up front for the Jets where he worked hard to create chances for his sides attack which was highlighted by the ball played to Tarek Elrich for the game's only goal.

ST: Besart Berisha – The Albanian import scored his second brace in eight days as he took his goal tally to 17 goals this season.

RF: Paul Ifill – Ifill helped his sides solid defensive work pay off against Sydney FC by scoring the game's only goal in a victory away from home.

Star Man

Besart Berisha
Brisbane Roar



Berisha had another clinical display over the weekend scoring a brace away from home against Perth Glory. The Brisbane striker has a tally of 17 goals this season, eight more than the league's equal second top goal scorers Jeremy Brockie and Shane Smeltz. Berisha may be a controversial figure in the league, but the Albanian is arguably one of the most dangerous strikers to come onto the shores of the A-League and recently signed a two year contract extension at the Roar which will see him remain at the club till the end of the 2013/14 season.

Thank God It's Friday... GW is now available at all good newsagents every Friday
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Newcastle Jets



1

Adelaide United



0

Match Details

Newcastle Jets 1 (Tarek Elrich 39')
 Adelaide United 0
 At Hunter Stadium
 Referee: Ben Williams
 Crowd: 10,383

Newcastle Jets: 1. Ben Kennedy (Gk), 4. Nikolai Topor-Stanley, 5. Tiago, 6. Ben Kantarovski (2. Taylor Regan 51') 8. Jeremy Brockie, 10. Ruben Zadkovich, 11. Tarek Elrich (22. Ali Abbas 71') 13. Byun Sung-Hwan, 23. Ryan Griffiths, 24. Francis Jeffers (9. Michael Bridges 79') 25. Jacob Pepper

Yellow Cards: Zadkovich 58', Regan 85', Bridges 90+1
 Red Cards: Nil

Adelaide United: 1. Eugene Galekovic (Gk), 2. Osama Malik, 3. Nigel Boogaard, 6. Cassio, 8. Evgeniy Levchenko, 9. Sergio Van Dijk, 10. Dario Vidasic (7. Zenon Caravella 73') 14. Cameron Watson, 17. Iain Ramsay, 18. Fabian Barbiero, 21 Francisco Usucar (15. Jacob Melling 15' [11. Bruce Djite 67])

Yellow Cards: Levchenko 13', Melling 56'
 Red Cards: Nil

By Shaun Dyas

The Newcastle Jets have defeated Adelaide United 1-0 in a tense, tight and often scrappy encounter in front 10,383 fans at Hunter Stadium.

Tarek Elrich was the hero for the home side, smartly finishing some clever lead up work from former England International Francis Jeffers.

Englishman Jeffers claimed possession from a half cleared corner 30 yards from goal. The home fans begged for the striker to shoot. What he did next was nothing short of brilliant. He played an inch perfect pass along the ground to find the feet of Elrich who had managed to steal some space from his opponent. He turned inside with a sharp touch before thumping a low drive across Adelaide keeper Eugene Galekovic from 12 yards on a tight angle. The result has ended Adelaide's chances of playing finals football, but defender Nigel Boogaard was quick to refocus his teammates on Adelaide's Asian Champions League campaign.

"We have to pull our finger out now and focus on preparing for Asia," he said bluntly just after the final whistle.

Both teams had earlier struggled to create chances in a cagey opening, with the best of the chances coming from a weak Byun Sung-Hwan free kick for the home side in the 9th minute.

Adelaide had an early sighter through Sergio Van Dijk two minutes later. The big Dutchman found himself in space 25 yards from goal and crunched a left footed effort that went quickly before nestling in the side netting. Unfortunately for the Reds, it was the wrong side of the post. At this stage the game had started to become a niggly affair which concluded with Evgeniy Levchenko going into the referee's notebook on 13 minutes for a cynical challenge. Minutes later Uruguayan Midfielder Francisco Usucar limped from the field appearing to be troubled by his left leg, with youngster Jacob Melling coming on.

Both teams struggled to adapt to the new addition in midfield and the only real chance apart from the goal was created by Ryan Griffiths in the 34th minute for the home side. He picked the ball up 30 yards from his own goal and charged away on

Match Stats	
1	Saves
1	Attempts on target
7	Attempts off target
57%	Possession
0	Corners
2	Offsides
14	Fouls committed
43%	
3	
2	
24	



Newcastle United's Tarek Elrich scores his first A-League goal and a timely winner. Photo: BEN NEVILLE

the counter attack. He had Boogaard and Iain Ramsay for company, but he cut inside them before sliding a pass to Jeremy Brockie on the edge of Adelaide's penalty area. He wasted his shot, firing over from 15 yards under the attention of Levchenko and Galekovic.

The second half began much the same way as the first, with both sides becoming embroiled in an increasingly dull and cagey affair.

Adelaide continued to create only half chances, with Dario Vidasic being guilty of displaying poor finishing on a number of occasions. It was a poor performance from the talismanic Adelaide creator on a

night that they really needed him to stand up and be counted. Adelaide coach John Kosmina ended his misery when he substituted him for Zenon Caravella in the 73rd minute.

Newcastle finally had another chance on 73 minutes. A free kick was quickly taken by Griffiths who passed to Brockie. The Kiwi international was 30 yards from goal but that did not stop him as he thrashed a left footed drive towards Galekovic's goal. To the disbelief of everyone in the stadium, the ball drifted narrowly wide and not inside the right hand upright of Galekovic.

Adelaide began to create a couple of

opportunities later in the match, with the first arriving from a Ramsay corner in the 80th minute. The ball was whipped in and looked to be a comfortable claim for Newcastle keeper Ben Kennedy. Instead the custodian, who had rarely been tested all night, fumbled the ball at the feet of Osama Malik. In the resulting melee, the Adelaide utility could only scuff his shot wide of the goal.

Although they never looked likely, Adelaide almost stole a point deep into added time. Galekovic hoisted the ball up field where it struck Ramsay in the back of the legs before arriving at the feet of Van Dijk. The striker did not need a second invita-

tion and blasted a shot towards the bottom corner of the net. Kennedy had other ideas though as he superbly finger tipped the effort around the post.

Galekovic came up for the resulting corner in a last ditch bid to gain the equaliser. Ramsay whipped in another corner that Van Dijk could only head meekly wide under severe pressure from Kennedy.

Adelaide now have to pick themselves up for a clash against Perth Glory on Sunday afternoon at Hindmarsh Stadium, while the Jets have another must win encounter when they come up against the Melbourne Victory at AAMI Park on Saturday night.



Jets' Ryan Griffiths navigates his way around Adelaide United's Evgeniy Levchenko.
 Photo: BEN NEVILLE



Tarek Elrich gets a wedgie for his troubles courtesy of Francisco Usucar.
 Photo: BEN NEVILLE

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Sydney FC

0



By Mike Salter

Despite producing patches of excellent football and several clear-cut chances, Sydney FC were defeated at home by a Wellington team which produced one straightforward goal and a resolute defensive display.

The hosts began the game in aggressive fashion. In the third minute young Joel Chianese, starting for Sydney once again, laid the ball neatly aside for Bruno Cazarine, who fired just over the bar with his left foot. Five minutes later Cazarine was presented with his customary early headed chance, an excellent cross from Scott Jamieson allowing the Brazilian to utilise his power in the air; Mark Paston did well to save.

Sydney had made all the early running, but it was the away side who went in front in the 13th minute. Confusion in the Sydney midfield allowed Wellington to work the ball across to Tony Lochhead in an acre of space on the left flank; the All White fullback's superb cross was met by the head of Paul Ifill, and Sydney fans were greeted with the depressingly familiar scenario of their guests opening the scoring.

A shot across the bows from Nick Carle soon after the goal indicated that Sydney were determined to get back on level terms as soon as possible, and Vitezslav Lavicka's men did have the better of the rest of the half, despite creating few real chances. In a controversial incident on 23 minutes, Chianese found himself in a race for the ball with Paston and went to ground in the box as the ball squirted clear; many felt he had claims for a penalty, but instead the youngster was cautioned for diving.

Carle had another good chance on 34 minutes, tricking his way elegantly

past Ben Sigmund but failing to hit the target from only 10 yards. This, however, was not as good an opportunity as the one that fell to Cazarine three minutes prior to the break; for once, Sydney's marquee man Brett Emerton hit the right-hand byline and delivered a perfect cross, but Cazarine this time planted a weak header at Paston. Although the Phoenix keeper failed to gather cleanly, Cazarine's attempts to bundle the ball home were foiled by the quick-witted Wellington rearguard.

Ifill almost brought his own and his team's tally to two soon after the break, snapping up a loose ball by the left-hand byline and guiding it just wide of the far post. Then it was Brett Emerton's turn to take over. First forcing Paston to palm a corner off his line, the Sydney No.7 then sent a 25-yard free kick agonisingly wide of Paston's far post. Emerton tested the All White keeper again just afterwards with a stinging low shot from just outside the area, and from the resulting corner Chianese's shot was fortuitously deflected wide. Sydney were coming ominously close.

Again it was Ifill who brought the

visitors back into the game with two chances in quick succession. A ball inside from Leo Bertos saw the Barbadian flick the ball just over the Sydney bar, and then a fine cross from the right almost induced Pascal Bosschaert to prod the ball into his own net; Necevski's reflexes saved the day.

Sydney were rocked back on their heels, and the visitors managed to contain the onslaught from the hosts for a considerable period thereafter. The arrival of Terry Antonis in place of an ineffectual Hiro Moriyasu sparked a brief revival; Antonis whipped a left-footed shot just wide on 81 minutes, and the free kicks now began to arrive for the Sky Blues. Rhyan Grant and Antonis both had half-chances before Sydney's best chance to grab a share of the points came in injury time: a cross was misjudged by Paston, and Michael Beauchamp found himself with a close-range shot at goal, which he shanked over the bar.

That was that for the hosts, who had played some fine football at times but been thwarted throughout by an excellent Wellington defence.

Gold Coast United

1



Melbourne Victory

1



Match Details

GOLD COAST UNITED 1
(Rigters 50')MELBOURNE VICTORY 1
(Hernandez 57')

HT: 0-0

Referee: Regis Queffelec
At Skilled Park, Gold Coast

Gold Coast United: 20.Jerrad Tyson [gk], 2.Josh Brillante, 3.Michael Thwaite (c), 4.Zac Anderson, 5.Kristian Rees, 7.Golgol Mebrahtu (21.Daniel Severino 88'), 14.Ben Halloran (11.Jake Barker-Daish 14'), 15.Adama Traore, 16.Maceo Rigters, 28.Daniel Bowles, 33.Mitch Cooper (31.Daniel Bragg 90+1'). Unused subs: 40.Chris O'Connor [gk].

Yellow cards: Rigters 70', Barker-Daish 86'.

Red cards: None.

Melbourne Victory: 21.Ante Covic [gk], 2.Matthew Foschini, 4.Petar Franjic, 5.Mark Milligan, 7.Mathew Kemp (6.Leigh Broxham 75'), 10.Archie Thompson, 11.Marco Rojas (19.Isaka Cernak 55'), 16.Carlos Hernandez, 17.Jimmy Jeggo (9.Jean Carlos Solorzano 56'), 22.Harry Kewell (c), 24.Ubay Lizardo.

Unused subs: 1.Tando Velaphi [gk]. Yellow cards: Milligan 59'.

Red cards: None.

Gold Coast hangs on against Victory

By Neil Favager

ANOTHER impressive performance from Gold Coast United's class of 2012 has secured a well-deserved and hard-earned point against Melbourne Victory, with a fiercely contested match ending 1-1 at Skilled Park.

Played in greasy conditions after a two-day deluge on the Gold Coast, the entertaining encounter could have yielded more for the home side had they not conceded the equaliser soon after opening the scoring early in the second half.

United's youngsters matched the vastly more experienced Victory outfit for much of the match, forcing the visitors to try their luck from distance as they desperately looked for the winner.

Gold Coast's chances of taking something from the match looked to have been dealt an early blow after just 14 minutes when young flyer Ben Halloran was forced off with a hip injury. Another promising youngster, Jake Barker-Daish, replaced Halloran and took up a central midfield role with Mitch Cooper pushing into a wider position.

The loss of Halloran and the ensuing reshuffle initially unsettled Gold Coast with the visitors looking increasingly dangerous, particularly on the break.

United defender Zac Anderson did well to hold off Melbourne's go-to striker Archie Thompson as he shaped to shoot in the 22nd minute, then soon afterwards Carlos Hernandez thumped a low shot inches wide of the post.

Harry Kewell brought the best out of Gold Coast keeper Jerrad Tyson with a curling effort from all of 30 me-



The Gold Coast continued their recent rich vein of form against Victory. Photo: ADRIAN GAGLIONE

tres, but perhaps the best chance of the first period fell to the home side midway through the half.

A long ball from Kristian Rees was made more productive by the hesitation of Victory custodian Ante Covic, allowing Maceo Rigters to steal in. From the narrowest of angles Rigters managed to lob the ball over Covic, only to watch it bobble agonisingly wide of the far post.

For all their possession Melbourne failed to create too much in the way of clear cut chances and they were made to pay five minutes into the second period when United took the

lead.

Maceo Rigters applied the finish, but the move that led to the goal was a thing of beauty. Started by Golgo Mebrahtu, United worked the ball down the right hand side via Michael Thwaite and Daniel Bowles, before neat interplay between Cooper and Barker-Daish left Rigters with an opening and the Dutchman made no mistake.

However, Gold Coast's lead lasted just six minutes with the leveller coming predictably from the right foot of Hernandez. The Costa Rican seems to love scoring spectacular

goals at Skilled Park and he added to his portfolio with an unstoppable 20-metre drive that flew past Tyson.

Hernandez, Kewell, Solorzano and Archie Thompson all tried their luck as the match entered its closing stages, but Tyson produced another solid performance to keep the visitors at bay.

At the other end, Barker-Daish almost capped a fine display with a goal when he showed impressive technique to drill a shot at goal that forced Covic into a smart save.

"I was really pleased with some of the football we played and how com-

posed we were," said United Coach Mike Mulvey after the match.

"I thought the goal we scored was superb with some great passing movement and a good finish from Maceo."

"Perhaps the only disappointment is conceding a goal so soon after scoring ourselves, but that's something we have to learn from."

"I'm very happy with the progress we've made and the next phase of that progression is to turn our performances into wins on the board," he said.



Victory's Archie Thompson and Isaka Cernak smother Carlos Hernandez after the Costa Rican's blistering strike. Photo: ADRIAN GAGLIONE



Gold Coast's Mitch Cooper and Victory's Harry Kewell go toe to toe. Photo: ADRIAN GAGLIONE



Friday, March 16
Kick-off 8.00pm
AAMI Park

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Perth Glory



0

By Gareth Morgan

Reigning champions Brisbane Roar showed why they remain very much the benchmark side in the Hyundai A-League with a 3-0 win over Perth Glory on Saturday night.

Besart Berisha (2) and Henrique were on target for the visitors, although the later took the gloss of a fine personal performance when he was dismissed shortly after the hour-mark for raising his hands to Jacob Burns.

nib Stadium was turned into a sea of white as the White Line Fever theme for Therapy Focus captured the imagination of the Glory faithful and the thousands of white scarves handed out to the fans were soon being used as impromptu umbrellas when an unseasonal rainstorm swept in from the south shortly after kick-off.

On the field, meanwhile, it was the visitors who looked the more purposeful in the opening exchanges, dominating possession and probing away at Glory's backline with their trademark short passing game.

The home side gamely tried to squeeze Roar and deny them any space to work in, but Ange Postecoglou's men retained their composure and looked a real threat every time Henrique received the ball down the right.

Having flashed a shot across Danny Vukovic's bows as early as the tenth minute, the livewire Brazilian went one better midway through the half when he came in off his wing to hand his side the lead.

Besart Berisha was the provider, threading a clever through ball between Bas van den Brink and Steve Pantelidis and Henrique was on it in a flash, rounding the helpless Vukovic before netting from a tight angle.

The goal ironically came moments after Billy Mehmet had fired Glory's first shot just wide of Roar 'keeper Michael Theoklitos' left-hand post and to their credit, Ian Ferguson's side upped their game in the immediate aftermath of the opening goal.



The Roar are starting to purr again, just in time for the run home to finals football. Photo: ANITA MILAS

With the back four playing a higher line than they had in the early exchanges, Glory managed to gain more of a foothold in midfield and the result was two decent half-chances before the break.

Firstly Travis Dodd weaved his way into the box only to lose his footing on the greasy surface as he prepared to pull the trigger.

And then in first-half stoppage time, Dean Heffernan managed to get forward down the left and whip in a dangerous cross, but as Mehmet loomed,

Theoklitos just managed to get a vital fist onto the ball and deflect it away to safety.

Having finished the first-half on the front foot, Glory began the second in a similar vein and created their best chance of the game to date seven minutes in.

Steven McGarry showed great vision to slip the ball inside Ivan Franjic and release Sterjovski, but Theoklitos got down well to beat away the former Socceroo's shot at the near post.

Just as they mounted their first sus-

tained period of pressure in the game, however, Glory were stung by the visitors on the break.

The irrepressible Henrique again carved out a crossing opportunity down the right and this time Berisha was the recipient, holding off van den Brink before swivelling to lash a close-range shot past Vukovic.

Two minutes later Roar stunned the Shed into silence as Berisha turned home Nick Fitzgerald's cross to bag his second and his side's third, but the decibel level was almost immedi-

ately restored as Henrique received his marching orders for aiming a slap across the face of Jacob Burns.

Even with ten men, however, Roar remained largely unruffled and for all Glory's efforts, they struggled to break down a defence marshalled by Matt Smith and Mohamed Adnan.

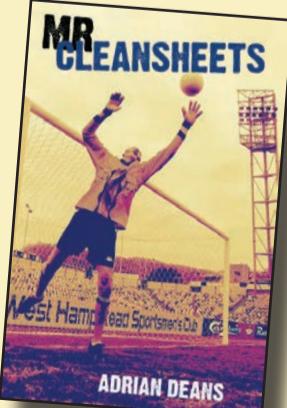
On came Andrezinho Todd Howarth and Tommy Amphlett, but despite getting into some decent positions, the home side failed to test Theoklitos.

Perth Glory's Travis Dodd escapes the attention of Roar's Erik Paartalu.
Photo: EDUARDO MORGANPerth's Steve McGarry gives chase to Roar's Thomas Broich.
Photo: EDUARDO MORGAN

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ADRIAN DEANS

Friday 2nd March 2012

Melbourne Heart

HEART

1



CC Mariners

0



Match Details

Melbourne Heart 1 (Bablj 50')

Central Coast Mariners 0

Venue: AAMI Park

Referee: Jarred Gillett

Attendance: 5,034

Melbourne Heart: 1. Clint Bolton, 2.

Michael Marrone, 3. Brendan Hamill (13. Jonatan Germano 71'), 4. Simon Colosimo, 5. Fred (11. Alex Terra 79'), 6. Matt Thompson, 16. Aziz Behich, 18. Curtis Good, 19. Eli Babalj, 23. Mate Dugandzic (7. Rutger Worm 65'), 26. Paul Reid.

Unused substitutes: 30. Sebastian Mattei

Yellow cards: Aziz Behich 12', Paul Reid 16', Fred 43', Eli Babalj 64', Matt Thompson 78', Alex Terra 90+3'.

Red cards: Nil.

Central Coast Mariners: 1. Mathew Ryan, 3. Joshua Rose, 4. Pedj Bojic, 6.

Patrick Zwaanswijk, 7. John Hutchinson, 8. Rostyn Griffiths, 14. Michael McGlinchey (12. Troy Hearfield 79'), 17. Tomas Rogic (2. Daniel McBreen 83'), 18. Alex Wilkinson, 19. John Sutton (9. Bernie Ibini 58'), 23. Adam Kwasnik

Unused substitutes: 20. Justin Pasfield

Yellow cards: Mathew Ryan 12', Adam Kwasnik 13', Pedj Bojic 64'

Red cards: Nil.

Babalj the difference for a second week

By Daniel Quinn

Melbourne Heart have defeated Central Coast Mariners 1-0 in a scrappy game at AAMI Park on Sunday afternoon.

Melbourne Heart and coach John van 't Schip made six changes with Eli Babalj, Matt Thompson, Aziz Behich, Mate Dugandzic, Curtis Good and Paul Reid all coming in for Rutger Worm, Wayne Srhoj, Alex Terra, Jonathan Germano, David Williams and Craig Goodwin.

Central Coast coach Graham Arnold made two changes from their thrilling 3-3 draw with Gold Coast on Wednesday with Mat Ryan returning from Olyroos duty to replace Justin Pasfield and John Hutchinson also coming in for Adrian Pellegrino.

The game started off slowly but on 11 minutes the game was livened up when Behich left his foot in on Ryan as the Olyroos 'keeper collected the ball. Both players were subsequently yellow carded.

The first real chance came from Tomas Rogic on 17 minutes but his low effort was comfortably saved by Heart custodian Clint Bolton.

Two minutes later Rogic tested Bolton again with an effort almost identical to the previous effort but Bolton once again saved easily.

On the half-hour mark Pedj Bojic created the best chance of the game when he put in a great ball for Adam Kwasnik but the 28-year-old headed just wide of the upright.

Fred created Heart's first real chance of the half but curled his effort into the hands of Ryan.

Five minutes into the second-half Melbourne Heart took the lead through Babalj. Dugandzic was found



Heart's Eli Babalj scores the all-important winner for a second consecutive week. Photo: TIME SIZE

on the right wing and played it to Fred whose initial scuffed effort was tucked home by the 19-year-old.

Soon later the referee Jarred Gillett gave a penalty after Fred fouled Rogic inside the box. Sutton stepped up but the Englishman hit his effort off the post. Patrick Zwaanswijk's follow-up effort was also weak and easily saved on the goal line by Bolton.

Coach Graham Arnold however wanted Zwaanswijk to take the penalty instead of Sutton who had never seen taken a penalty.

Coach Graham Arnold however

Two minutes after Bernie Ibini came on for Sutton he cut in from the left but Bolton was behind it to make another save.

Heart went right up the other end and Behich drove his effort just wide of the far post however Babalj was unmarked in the centre.

On 75 minutes Kwasnik was looking for an equaliser but curled his effort just wide of the far post.

One minute later Babalj had a huge chance to extend the lead after beating Alex Wilkinson but fired over the

bar.

With five minutes to go Michael Marrone, who was selected for the Socceroos squad, fired a long range drive but Ryan comfortably saved.

Heart were able to hold on for the win which means that Melbourne Heart jump Newcastle into fifth place.

After Brisbane Roar's defeat of Perth that means the Mariner's lead up the top is cut down to three points.

Central Coast Mariner's boss Graham Arnold thought he side played well despite the loss. "I thought we

played well tonight, much better performance than when we were down here last time against Melbourne Heart and I thought we definitely had the opportunities to win the game but in the end of the day it's football so let's move on quickly."

Melbourne Heart coach John van 't Schip was delighted to get the three points. "Yeah very important, three points in this last phase after having of course the games of course that we lost and now we have won two in a row."



Heart keeper Clint Bolton spoils John Sutton's (19) spot kick.
Photo: DANIEL FLIS



Heart's Rutger Worm and Mariner's China bound Rostyn Griffiths tussle for the ball. Photo: DANIEL FLIS

BE A PART OF MELBOURNE'S HEART

Top Shots!**PICS OF ROUND 23**

Brisbane Roar dedicate Besart Berisha's goal to team-mate Massimo Murdocca's new baby. Photo: ANITA MILAS

Through the wind and the rain: Victory's Harry Kewell soaks it up on the Gold Coast:
ADRIAN GAGLIONE



Les
Shorrock's
Action
Packed
Picture
Page



Heart players surround Eli Babalj after the big man gets the winner over Mariners. Photo: DANIEL FLIS



Gold Coast United fans express their right to freedom of speech. Is anyone listening? Photo: ADRIAN GAGLIONE



Mariners coach Graham Arnold puckers up. Photo: TIM SIZE



Don't panic! Phoenix's Ben Sigmund tries to reassure keeper Mark Paston in the match against Sydney FC. Photo: GEOFF JONES



Gold Coast United fans send out an SOS to the powers at be, but by Wednesday afternoon the writing was well and truly on the wall. Photo: ADRIAN GAGLIONE



Roar Line Up

1. Michael Theoklitos (GK)
2. Matt Smith (C)
3. Shane Stefanutto
4. Matt Jurman
5. Ivan Franjic
6. Erik Paaralu
7. Besart Berisha
8. Massimo Murdocca
11. Issey Nakajima-Farran
14. Rocky Visconte
16. Mohamed Adnan
17. Mitch Nichols
19. Jack Hingert
20. Andrew Redmayne (GK)
21. James Meyer
22. Thomas Broich
24. Nick Fitzgerald.
- *two to be omitted*

In: 4. Matt Jurman (returns from Qantas Australian U23 duty), 14. Rocky Visconte (returns from Qantas Australian U23 duty), 22. Thomas Broich (returns from injury)

Out: 10. Henrique (Suspended - two weeks)

Unavailable: Nil



Victory Line Up

1. Tando Velaphi (gk)
2. Matthew Foschini
4. Petar Franjic
5. Mark Milligan
6. Leigh Broxham
7. Matthew Kemp
9. Jean Carlos Solorzano
10. Archie Thompson
11. Marco Rojas
13. Diogo Ferreira
14. Billy Celeski
16. Carlos Hernandez
17. Jimmy Jeggo
18. Danny Allsopp
19. Isaka Cernak
21. Ante Covic (GK)
22. Harry Kewell
24. Ubay Lizardo
- *three to be omitted*

In: 14. Billy Celeski (returns from injury), 13. Diogo Ferreira (returns from Qantas Australian U23 duty)

Out: 3. Fabio, 23. Adrian Leijer (c)

Unavailable: 8. Grant Brebner (injured), Adrian Leijer (injured), Fabio (injured)

Brisbane Roar v Melbourne Heart

Fri 2 Mar Suncorp Stadium 8:00pm

By Jarrod Ellis

Brisbane Roar will hope to maintain their title challenge this Friday when they play host to Melbourne Heart at Suncorp Stadium.

The Heart gave Brisbane's bid for the A-League Premier's Plate a massive boost last weekend by downing ladder leaders Central Coast 1-0.

The defeat, coupled with the second-placed Roar's 3-0 away win over Perth Glory on Saturday, has cut the gap between the two teams to only three points, with four rounds of the season remaining.

It was a margin that had stretched out to 11 points before Brisbane beat Central Coast in Gosford on February 4.

That was the first of four successive wins for Brisbane, while the Mariners have picked up just four points from their past five matches. The Roar can draw level with the Mariners, for 24 hours at least, by beating the Heart on Friday night at Suncorp Stadium.

In order to do that they'll need to collect the three points without the input of winger Henrique. The Brazilian was hit with a two-match ban for his slap against Perth skipper Jacob Burns and subsequent red card.

He's likely to be replaced by Nick Fitzgerald, the young forward who stepped up in place of the absent Thomas Broich against Perth. Broich



Odds:
Roar 1.72
Draw 4.00
Heart 5.75

Roar prepare to pass Heart test

Head-to-Head: All matches (played 5): Brisbane Roar wins 3, Melbourne Heart wins 1 (1 draw)

was ruled out with shoulder troubles last weekend but is likely to make a return against Melbourne, however considering how important his presence is to the side it shouldn't come as a major shock if he is withdrawn from the squad as a precaution.

In comparison Melbourne will enter the match with a fully fit and available squad for the first time this since year, a fact sure to have pleased John van't Schip.

With only four weeks remaining until the Hyundai A-League Finals Series is underway, Heart is locked in a tight battle to secure its place in the top

six for the first time in Club history. While only a fortnight ago, the likelihood of Heart hosting a home final appeared rather bleak, back-to-back victories over Gold Coast United and the Central Coast Mariners have reinvigorated the side's hopes, closing to within three points of third placed Wellington.

Heart employed a change of tactics against Central Coast last weekend, allowing their opposition to dominate possession and it will be interesting to see if Van't Schip sends his team out to play the same way against Brisbane.

Van't Schip wasn't giving much away during the week, merely emphasising the need for his charges to focus on the game at hand.

"I don't want to count, I just want to look ahead and get as much as possible points and it's easy to have a calculation up but I don't think we should do that," he said.

"Brisbane now is a very difficult game. They are back in there best way of playing and it's going to be a hard game up there, so I'm not going to count."

Kiss of Death
Roar 2-1 Heart

Melbourne Victory v Newcastle Jets

Sat 3 Mar AAMI Park 5:30pm

By John Clark

The Melbourne Victory host Newcastle on Saturday evening, hoping to extend an unbeaten home streak that currently sits at 15.

The streak is the second longest in the leagues history, but some may question if it's warranted considering that it has consisted of nine draws. That record warranted or not, will be tested this weekend when they face the inform Jets who have taken 12 points from their last five matches.

Last weekend was a real boon for their finals chances with a couple of their nearest rivals in Sydney and Melbourne dropping point to less fancied opposition and the Jets getting the job done against Adelaide.

The real strength for Newcastle is they have such an even spread of goal scoring options. Jeffers, Brockie, Griffiths, Bridges and Abbas make up an impressive attacking arsenal.

Against Adelaide however the winner came from an unlikely source with Tarek Elrich scoring just his first goal since November 2008 to fire Newcastle into the top 6. Elrich has found himself further up the pitch of late and his switch with Ruben Zadkovich has been a big reason that the Jets find their finals destiny in their own hands. The Victory unsurprisingly slogged out another draw last weekend in difficult conditions on the Gold Coast.

They did create enough chances to win the match, but Gold Coast keeper



Head-to-Head: All matches (played 20): Melbourne Victory wins 7, Newcastle Jets wins 9 (4 draws)

Jerrad Tyson denied them multiple times, ironically the same man should have been sent from the field in the first quarter of an hour after he collided heavily with Archie Thompson who was otherwise in on goal.

Eventually it was a brilliant piece of finishing by Carlos Hernandez that secured the point for the Victory. Once again the brilliant Costa Rican has scored some amazing goals this season and ensuring he remains at the club next year must surely be a high priority for the Victory board.

These sides have met twice this season with both games producing high

scoring, fast paced football.

The Jets came away with a 3-1 win at home in the first encounter with a Ryan Griffiths brace the highlight, after Carlos Hernandez had earlier given the Victory the lead. In the return leg at AAMI Park the Victory reversed the score line to come away with a 3-1 win. Unusually that night Korean defender Byun created a piece of trivia for years to come when he scored a double for the Victory.

In team news the Victory will be without captain Adrian Leijer after he was ruled out for the season. Fabio will also miss, while Jim Magilton will be hoping that

Harry Kewell, Mark Milligan and Archie Thompson pull up fine after a midweek encounter for the Socceroos against Saudi Arabia.

The Jets have a relatively clean bill of health with skipper Jobe Wheelhouse a chance of returning after missing the past two matches. I think the Victory will continue that unbeaten home record, however Newcastle is good enough to take something here.

Kiss of Death
Victory 1-1 Jets



Jets Line Up

1. Ben Kennedy
2. Taylor Regan
4. Nikolai Topor-Stanley
5. Tiago Calvano
6. Ben Kantarovsky
8. Jeremy Brockie
9. Michael Bridges
10. Ruben Zadkovich
11. Tarek Elrich
12. Jobe Wheelhouse
13. Sung-Hwan Byun
14. Labinot Haliti
19. Matthew Nash
22. Ali Abbas
23. Ryan Griffiths
24. Francis Jeffers
25. Jacob Pepper
26. Connor Chapman.

In: Wheelhouse, Haliti, Chapman

Out: nil

Unavailable: nil

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Mariners Line Up

1. Mathew Ryan (GK)
2. Daniel Mcgreen
3. Joshua Rose
4. Patrick Zwaanswijk
5. John Hutchinson
6. Bernie Ibini
7. Adriano Pellegrino
8. Oliver Bozanic
9. Troy Hearfield
10. Michael McGlinchey
11. Brad McDonald
12. Trent Sainsbury
13. Tomas Rogic
14. Alex Wilkinson (C)
15. John Sutton
16. Justin Pasfield (GK)
17. Sam Gallagher
18. Mustafa Amini
19. Adam Kwasnik
- *Four To Be Omitted*

In: 10. Adriano Pellegrino,
11. Oliver Bozanic, 15. Brad
McDonald, 16. Trent Sainsbury,
21. Sam Gallagher, 22. Mustafa
Amini (All Promoted)

Out: 4. Pedj Bojic (Suspended
- 1 Game), 8. Rostyn Griffiths
(Transferred)
Unavailable: Nil



Phoenix Line Up

1. Mark Paston (GK)
2. Manny Muscat
3. Tony Lochhead
4. Tim Brown
5. Leo Bertos
6. Paul Ifill
7. Chris Greenacre
8. Nicky Ward
9. Mirjan Pavlovic
10. Vince Lia
11. Ben Sigmund
12. Jimmy Downey
13. Tony Warner (GK)
14. Dani Sanchez
15. Andrew Durante (C)
16. Alex Smith
- *two to be omitted*

In: Andrew Durante (returns
from suspension), Tim Brown
(returns from suspension),
Mirjan Pavlovic (promoted).

Out: Daniel (ankle injury - 2 - 3
weeks), Brent Griffiths (omitted).

Unavailable: Cameron Lindsay
(international duty), Lucas Pan-
telis (knee injury - indefinite)

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Gold Coast Line Up

1. Jerrad Tyson (gk)
2. Josh Brillante
3. Michael Thwaite (c)
4. Zac Anderson
5. Kristian Rees
6. Golgo Mebrahtu
7. Jake Barker-Daish
8. Ben Halloran
9. Adam Traore
10. Maceo Rigters
11. Chris Harold
12. Daniel Severino
13. Ambes Yosief
14. Daniel Bowles
15. Daniel Bragg
16. Mitch Cooper
17. Chris O'Connor (gk)
- *two to be omitted*

In: 27. Ambes Yosief (promoted),
31. Daniel Bragg (promoted).

Out: Nil.

Unavailable: 1. Glen Moss (groin
injury - 4 weeks), 6. Paul Beekman
(compassionate leave - indefinite),
9. Joel Porter (calf - 3 weeks), 10. Tahj
Minnicon (foot injury - 2 weeks),
12. Dylan Macallister (hamstring - 3
weeks), 13. Ante Rozic (hamstring in-
jury - 1 week), 18. James Brown (ankle
injury - 1 week), 19. Chris Broadfoot
(ankle injury - indefinite), 22. Peter
Jungschlager (hip injury - 1 week),
23. Dylan McGowan (international
duty).



CC Mariners v Sydney FC

Sat 3 Mar Bluetongue Stadium 7:45pm

By Adrian Deans

The Mariners are no longer concentrating on the road ahead.

They are watching nervously in the rear view mirror as Brisbane tailgate them like a bunch of rabid hooligans.

This is not a good time to be playing Sydney, who are desperate for a win to stay in the six and maybe even the outside chance of a home final.

There are several factors in the Mariners' favour – they are playing at home and they have confidence in the system that has worked so well for most of the season. They have all their Olyroos back on deck, and they know they outpace Sydney all over the park.

In Sydney's favour is the fact that the Mariners' system has pretty much been worked out by other teams. In the last few rounds, the teams that successfully closed down the Mariners' wide fullbacks prevented the likes of McGlinchey, Rogic and Amini (when available) from getting the ball in enough space to something useful with it.

There is also the fact that Rostyn Griffiths has been sold to China (presumably to shore up the Mariners' balance sheet prior to Russian purchase). He was a very important part of the Mariners' system – who now will break up the attacks at the front of the Mariners' third and start the swift counters upon which they thrive?

But do Sydney have the pace out

Head-to-Head: All matches (played 21): Central Coast Mariners wins 7, Sydney FC wins 8 (6 draws)

Mariners feel the heat

wide to close down Josh Rose and Trent Sainsbury (I think Bojic is suspended). Will they be prepared for the cross-field balls of Patrick Zwaanswijk (which put them under so much pressure at the SFS last time the teams met)?

Even if they do manage to close down the Mariners' attacking options, Sydney will still have to get past the tightest defence in the league. In Nick Carle they have the lever to prise open defences, but who will score the goals? Neither Cazarine nor Bridge have managed any consistency in front of goal but they have some in-

teresting youngsters in Chianese and Mallia, and Terry Antonis looked sharp off the bench last week.

The Mariners also have an outstanding young star-in-the-making in Tomas Rogic, who has looked more impressive in every outing. Sydney are notoriously slow in the centre of midfield and at the front of their defence. This is Rogic territory, and if he gets room to move he will make life hell for the likes of McFlynn, Bosschaart and Beauchamp.

The Mariners will be facing a selection headache with Amini and Bozanic available, but my big prediction is that

Odds:
Mariners 2.00
Draw 3.45
SFC 3.95

Wellington Phoenix v Gold Coast Utd

Sun 4 Mar Westpac Stadium 2:30pm

By Joe Gallagher

While Wellington Phoenix's run-in to the A-League playoffs is heating up, Gold Coast United's season is imploding around them.

The saga at Skilled Park has been one off-field disaster after another, and despite two matches without loss, United still occupy bottom spot on the ladder and look destined to pick up their first wooden spoon.

They've now got to pack their bags and head across the Tasman to the scene of their most infamous on-field crime, a six goal drubbing back in 2009-10.

That said the Phoenix, who snapped a two match losing run with a win at the Sydney Football Stadium last weekend, will be wary of a Gold Coast side with almost nothing to lose in the dying embers of their season – or perhaps even the club's existence.

Wellington themselves have plenty to prove to their vocal fan base after an unusual season which has seen them more profitable away from the capital than in it – a shocking statistic for a side that has regularly suffered from a devastating case of homesickness in their five year A-League career. They are back into third spot on the ladder and face a tricky final three games (twice in Melbourne before rounding out the season at home to

Odds:
Phoenix 1.50
Draw 4.25
Gold Coast 7.50

Phoenix look to consolidate finals spot

league leaders the Mariners) of the season. A win will be the absolute minimum for Ricki Herbert's men to haul themselves away from a clustered mid-table; as it stands, only six points separate third from seventh. The situation for Mike Mulvey's side is lightyears apart. Even mathematically, United are out of the running for the playoffs and they would need to pick up at least three wins in their last four games to avoid finishing dead last – a very tall order indeed for a side that hasn't won since Boxing Day. But Mulvey has targeted three points this weekend for a youthful Gold

Coast outfit who have undoubtedly shown signs of improvement in recent weeks with impressive draws against Melbourne Victory and Central Coast. He will be hopeful that one of the standouts of the campaign – Ben Halloran – will be back in his line-up after the attacker was substituted early in the draw against the Victory.

The hosts will still be without Brazilian midfielder Daniel but will otherwise be at full strength, with the likes of Paul Ifill and goalkeeper Mark Paston putting in excellent shifts for Herbert in Sydney. Paston, especially, has been at his best in recent weeks since re-

placing Tony Warner in goal the last time these two sides met.

That match was won in the dying minutes by Tim Brown for the Phoenix and sparked a four match winning run which saw them fly to the heights of second spot.

While Herbert should hope for a more flattering scoreline on Sunday, his opposite number will be desperate for a win to add at least some credibility to a season which no football fan on the Gold Coast will ever forget – but for all the wrong reasons.

Kiss of Death
Phoenix 3-0 Gold Coast



Palmer's insolent behaviour impossible for FFA to ignore



Robert Di Fabio

While football is growing in leaps and bounds on the pitch, off-field drama has circled the A-League throughout the past fortnight. And on Wednesday, the gauntlet was thrown on problem-child Gold Coast United, when Football Federation Australia revoked its A-League licence from controversial owner Clive Palmer.

The national governing body regrettably informed a packed media conference of its sudden decision, explaining how the verdict came after Gold Coast had denigrated the integrity of the competition, while also failing to comply with the completion rules, analogous to the other nine clubs. Specifically, the FFA confirmed that the decision to terminate Palmer's licence was ultimately due to three clear breaches of the Club Participation Agreement in recent days:

1. A conscious and deliberate contravention of FFA Policies and Procedures.
2. Deliberate defiance of a direction that was given by FFA; and
3. Repeated public statements made by or on behalf of Gold Coast United that bring the A-League, FFA and the game of football into disrepute and are prejudicial to the interests of FFA, the A-League and the game of football in Australia.

In a tumultuous period for the game, FFA CEO Ben Buckley said his team will do its utmost to make sure that Gold Coast play out their remaining four games of the season. Although, with infinite turmoil surrounding the club, he stopped short in saying that he cannot guarantee that the Surfers Paradise-outfit will complete the campaign.

"FFA will exhaust every practical option to have Gold Coast finish the season," Buckley said.

"If we need extra time to put in place the necessary arrangements then we will consider postponing the match."

Palmer, never one to back away from a legal stoush, confirmed via Twitter he is prepared to take the matter to the courts, before childishly condemning FFA chairman Frank Lowy.

"We intend to fight this ridiculous decision by incompetent FFA in the courts. Frank Lowy is an institution who now belongs in an institution," Palmer clarified.

Clearly incensed with the decision, Palmer who boasts a 68 to nil litigation record is adamant that his club has been treated in an unjust manner.

"We have been given no notice, we have had no hearing and we will pursue this in the high court in pursuit of natural justice," Palmer explained to The World Game.

"We don't know what the charge is and Frank Lowy has behaved in the manner of a dictator. He has asked for a fight and now he has one."

"Mr Lowy will have his day in court. He will be cross examined. We'll seek to have the FFA's records opened up over the multi-million salaries of their top executives and we will expose their poor corporate governance."

A distressed Lowy put on a brave face when fronting the media, transparently



That's show business folks: Gold Coast's Clive Palmer is beating to the rythm of his own drum.

saddened and disappointed by the whole scenario. What initially commenced as an optimistic expansion venture, ultimately emerged as a sour train-wreck.

"The material breach on Saturday night was followed by a statement from the club that it intended to continue using the slogan," said Lowy.

"This behavior came on top of public comments that displayed a total lack of respect for football and the millions of Australians who love the game.

"Such disrespectful behaviour, a flagrant disregard for the rules and a stated intent to continue breaking the rules made for an intolerable situation.

"As custodians of the game, we had to act to protect the integrity of the Hyundai A-League on behalf of the other nine clubs, players, coaches and most importantly, the fans."

While Palmer illustrated utter contempt towards the game, its administrators, clubs and fans, it was always going to be a taxing assignment for both parties to work together in a collaborative and constructive manner.

Opinion has been divided on FFA's timing of the announcement – hours before the Socceroos' World Cup qualifier with Saudi Arabia in Melbourne – and its subsequent decision to abandon Mr. Palmer's club,

amid fierce debate in the Twittersphere, accompanied with the many forums around the football community.

If we put the recent events into perspective – FFA made the correct decision in annulling the licence off Palmer.

No one single figure is bigger than the game at large. If Palmer couldn't find the time of day to respect the people within football – whose passion and commitment are often the catalysts to the code's success – then his presence inside the game was no longer welcomed.

In any walk of life, money doesn't necessarily buy happiness. In relation to Gold Coast United, encompassing the riches of a wealthy owner isn't the vehicle to unearthing success. A careful and considered blueprint must be adopted to winning over the support of your local market, in tandem with a mutual respect amongst the code's administration and the football community.

While Palmer may be a powerful figure in his billionaire business empire – often dictating terms with his associates – it's manifestly clear that the mining tycoon doesn't like to play by other peoples rules. Although he has claimed to invest sums of \$18 million into Gold Coast United, it certainly hasn't inspired to a thriving football club.

Palmer's failure to promote football on the Gold Coast, disrespectful nature towards his fans and outlandish comments about the game – recently fuelling fire by labelling the A-League as a "joke" and rugby league as better game than football – undoubtedly were the elements which broke the camel's back for the FFA.

The FFA welcomes investment in the A-League, however a financier has a sheer responsibility to uphold the integrity of the competition and endorse the game in a positive light. In Palmer's case, none of

these criteria were of a high priority.

With the current seven-year television deal with Fox Sports coming to a closure at the end of the 2012-13 campaign, the FFA can ill-afford to drop to a nine-team competition. While the FFA has flirted with the idea of a Western Sydney franchise, realistically a new team won't enter the league until the 2013-14 season at the earliest – assuming that there is adequate financial backing, a sound business model and marketable to its community.

Inverse to the doomsayers, the seventh instalment of Australia's rejuvenated domestic competition has been a ripe success on the pitch. The game is escalating in an upward trend – technical standards are evidently improving each season, tactically the game is cultivating in sophistication amongst the respective coaches, while off the pitch, statistics imply that the competition is heading on an upward spiral. Thus far this season, attendances are up 36 per cent, television viewings are up 52 per cent and club memberships are up 20 per cent. Echoing Lowy's sentiments, the game is in a good shape, the best it's been since its reform. And despite the mayhem currently engulfing the game, the future is bright.

Currently, the future of Gold Coast United appears vastly bleak. While Lowy professed his desire to have a 10-team competition next season, there is still the possibility of a Gold Coast team under new management and most importantly, new ownership. Many have argued that the United brand has been tarnished under the Palmer rein, conversely it could well be the unsullied injection many fans have adjourned for.

Follow Robert on Twitter @RobertDiFabio

A Club in a Nutshell

With Jimmy Piccolo

Associazione Cacio Chievo Verona, or A.C. Chievo Verona, more commonly known as Chievo, was founded in 1929 by a small group of football supporters. Chievo was named O.N.D Chievo and then Cardi Chievo before, changing to Pavan Chievo.

Finally they became A.C Chievo Verona and became a professional club in 1986. So who are they? Well, they are a northern Italian club playing in the city of Verona. Originally, they played their football at Carlantonio Bottagisio parish field. Over the course of the next 50 years, they rapidly climbed up through the pyramid of Italian football where today they ply their trade in the top tier, the Serie A, along with the likes of Juventus, A.C. Milan, Napoli and Inter Milan.

It wasn't until after yet another promotion that Chievo were ordered to find a new stadium due to the increase in supporters. This was after the 1974/75 season. Chievo were to share a ground with their cross town rivals, Hellas Verona, the much better supported of the two teams. Stadio Marc Antonio Bentegodi became their new home, and to this day this is where they entertain all the finest Italian footballers in the Serie A. Their noisy neighbours and bigger city rival Hellas meanwhile are way down in the Serie C1 division, but still draw bigger crowds than Chievo. The irony is that Hellas fans mocked Chievo, chanting about



their logo (a knight on a horse). Hellas supporters made derogatory comments, saying the horse was in fact a donkey and that the day Chievo played football in the Serie A would be the day that donkeys would fly. Chievo adopted the nickname of the "Flying Donkeys" and honour their badge and name to this day.

The Chievo badge shield has never changed. Their kit colour was originally white and blue, but they changed to yellow and blue and kept the white and blue for their away strip. Currently they are in 9th place in the top tier although the club are still under investigation in the Calcioscommesse (a name to describe the current betting scandal that has seen a host of Italian clubs up in the docks for prosecution). Chievo have already been fined 80,000 euro's for their part in the long running scandal.

Verona itself is a recognised world heritage site, littered with Roman monuments and also some wonderful medieval architecture. The balcony where Juliet is thought to have stood in her favourite nightwear teasing Romeo is one of the many places of interest, attracting thousands of tourists each year to leave soppy poems and love letters in thanks for the classic Shakespearian tale. Julius Caesar, the dictator of Republican

Rome and gradual founder of the Roman Empire, often chilled out in Verona for some peace and quiet, usually after busily invading Britain or getting a hoarse throat from too much shouting at his slaves whilst they were torn to pieces by lions during the gladiatorial battles in the amphitheatres. Maybe he took one of his fancy women like Cleopatra VII with him for a midnight stroll.

The flying donkeys may not pull in as many fans as were allowed to watch the gladiators fight, but 12,000 in a 39,000 capacity is the norm for Chievo during Serie A league games. Notable players to wear the yellow and blue are Luca Marchegiani, Andrea Barzaghi, Simone Perrotta, Franco Semoli, Mario Yepes, Bogdan Pătrașcu and Oliver Bierhoff, all players to have made an impact on the international scene.

So if you ever take a sight-seeing trip to the ancient city of Verona, you may well pass through the Porta Leoni, a 1st century B.C. ruin of what was once part of the Roman city gate. I should not think you would need a shield and a spear though, as there are no loose lions roaming the streets these days, but if you do take such weaponry be sure to leave it outside of the Marc Antonio Bentegodi club gift shop before stepping inside to purchase a stuffed "Flying Donkey" ... The locals may frown otherwise!

Griffiths exported to China

Central Coast Mariners can now confirm that that the club has agreed terms with Chinese Super League (CSL) team Guangzhou R&F to transfer midfielder Rostyn Griffiths for an undisclosed fee.

Griffiths left Australia on Tuesday bound for China where he will undertake a medical, and subsequent to satisfying Guangzhou R&F's requirements, will join the CSL newcomers for two seasons.

Central Coast Mariners Chairman, Mr Peter Turnbull, said the transfer represented a unique and lucrative opportunity for Griffiths and the club.

"This is a great opportunity for Rostyn - a young player who has blossomed under Graham Arnold - to set himself up for life," Turnbull said. "It also represented an opportunity for us as a football club to secure a very substantial transfer fee that may not be repeated."

"Rostyn had previously advised us that he never intended to play for any other Hyundai A-League club, but he was determined to pursue his career overseas. In union with him, we are pleased that we could arrive at an arrangement that benefits both Rostyn and the Central Coast Mariners."

"Central Coast Mariners are a football club that gives young Australian footballers the opportunity to develop themselves and make a career from the game. We remain committed to this ethos and in a week that sees Mathew Ryan earn



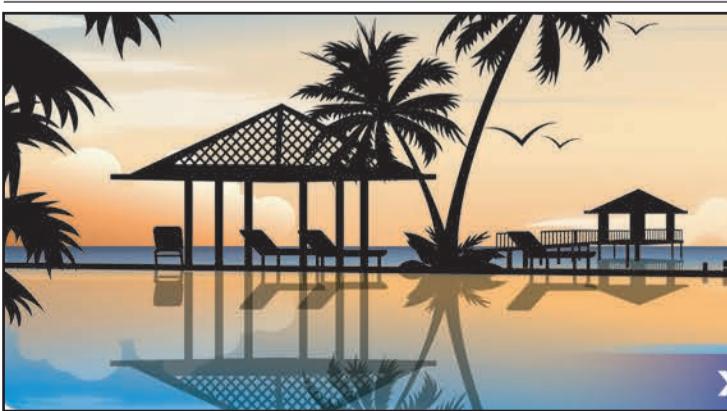
Rostyn Griffiths joins Matt Simon as another Mariner to head to Asia mid-season.

a place in the Qantas Socceroos for a FIFA World Cup Qualifier, as well as our National Youth League team destined to win the league, this philosophy is evident."

Mariners Head Coach Graham Arnold said that from a purely football perspective it was disappointing to lose Griffiths, but added that the opportunity for player and club was significant.

"It's fantastic for the player, it's fantastic for the club but I am disappointed to lose a player of Rostyn's quality at this time of the season," he said.

Subsequent to passing his medical Griffiths will return to Australia to collect his belongings and farewell his teammates, family and friends before making the switch to the team from Yuexiushan Stadium.



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PHOTO: DANIEL FILS



Back Row: Mark Bresciano, Jade North, Alex Brosque, Sasa Ognenovski, Mark Schwarzer, Matthew Spiranovic.
Front Row: Harry Kewell, Mark Milligan, James Troisi, Lucas Neill (C), Brett Emerton.

Super
Soccer
Superstars
Series
No. 23



Melbourne Victory's Harry Kewell celebrates on home turf after scoring the second Socceroo goal, and levels the scores at 2-2. Photo: ANITA MILAS



Les Shorrock's Action Packed Picture Page



Alex Brosque nods home his second of the night and makes it 3 Socceroo goals in as many minutes, as 1-2 is now 4-2. Photo: ANITA MILAS

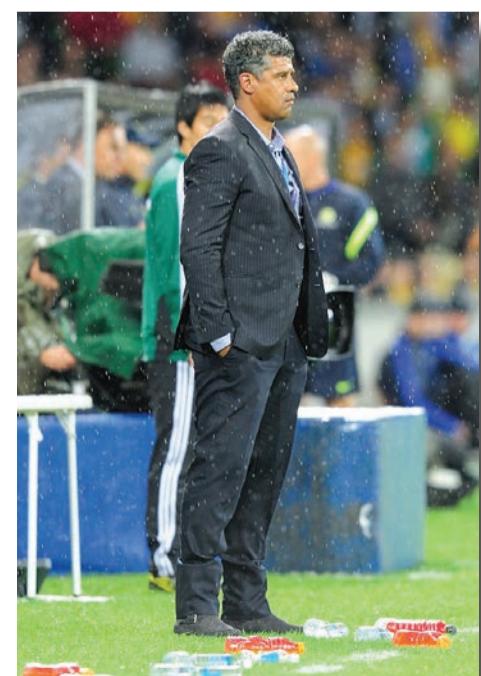


The rampage is well and truly in top gear as the Socceroos find the back of the net for a third time through Brett Emerton. Photo: ANITA MILAS

Captain Socceroo Luca Neill flies high to head home, but alas his goal was disallowed for offside. Photo: DANIEL FLIS



Alex Brosque pulls the Socceroo level at 1-1. Photo: DANIEL FLIS



Dutch legend and Saudi Arabian coach, Frank Rijkaard, senses the World Cup tie is slipping away Photo: DANIEL FLIS

The introduction of Archie Thompson certainly provided immediate dividends. Photo: DANIEL FLIS

Brett Emerton slides in to steer the ball home and the Socceroos to make it 3-2. Photo: DANIEL FLIS

Mariners in box seat for NYL title

By Daniel Quinn

This week we only have three games in the second last round of the National Youth League. Since Melbourne Heart were in Hawaii over the weekend competing in the Hawaii Invitational they played Central Coast Mariners in January and loss 3-1.

Gold Coast v Melbourne Victory washed out

The clash between Gold Coast United and Melbourne Victory at Owen Park on Sunday was postponed due to a waterlogged pitch. After 48-hours of torrential rain on the Gold Coast the game was declared unplayable on Sunday morning. The game might be rescheduled in the future but due to neither side affecting the title which is all but Central Coast's it is unlikely and even more unlikely after FFA have revoked Gold Coast United's license.

10-men Reds defeat Jets
A 10-men Adelaide United outfit has defeated Newcastle Jets 2-1

at Adamstown Oval on Saturday evening.

The first chance of the game came on 9 minutes when Liam Wooding's header was denied by Jack Duncan.

From the resulting corner Adelaide took the lead through Dion Kirk's back post header.

Adelaide went down to ten when Jacob Melling received two yellows inside two minutes so the visitors would have to play with ten for two-thirds of the game.

Soon later Labinot Haliti could have equalised but his headed drifted just wide of the upright.

On 70 minutes Newcastle should have equalised once again but John Hall made a great save to deny Kyle Bradberry before Haliti nodded his follow-up header over from six yards out.

With ten minutes to play Kirk grabbed his brace when he scored a great free-kick which curled into the top corner.

Haliti finally got himself on the score sheet with a tap in from Bradberry's cross.

Jets could have snatched it late on

but James Virgili fired over before Marko Jesic's free-kick hit the crossbar.

Roar finish Perth's chance of Glory

Brisbane Roar has defeated Perth Glory 4-2 at 6PR Stadium on Sunday which virtually ends Perth's chances of winning the NYL title and handing it to Central Coast Mariners.

Perth's best chance of the half came on 35 minutes but Riley Woodcock's effort was cleared off the line.

Perth however did open the scoring thank to Tommy Amphlett on 50 minutes who finished brilliantly.

But that lead only lasted three minutes as James Donachie rose unmarked from a corner to head home.

Brisbane were playing great through and a great passing move was finished off by Matthew Thurtell on 73 minutes to take the lead.

Thurtell then scored two inside five minutes when he scored his second with a fantastic individual effort.

With five minutes left George Lambaridis extended that lead when he was left unmarked.

Ndumba Makeche however did score with two minutes left but Perth were still two goals behind.

For Perth to win the NYL they would have to defeat Melbourne Victory next week but also turnaround a 19 goal difference. Central Coast Mariners play Sydney at home and one point will be enough to claim their first NYL title.

AIS shock Sydney

Second last placed AIS have shocked Sydney FC 2-1 at WIN Jubilee Oval on Sunday.

Sydney had a great chance to open the scoring on seven minutes with Jordan Figon but decided to chip goalkeeper Jordan Thurtell which was the wrong option.

But the AIS opened the scoring on 13 minutes after Scott Galloway did well to cross for Bright Appiah to power home. Ryan Norval in goals did get a hand but the immense power behind the effort was enough for the ball to hit the back of the net.

Figon was looking dangerous up front and played in Caleb Rufer but he couldn't convert.

Next Round

Fri 2 Mar 12 4:00pm

Gold Coast United FC Vs Brisbane Roar
Owen Park, Southport

Sat 3 Mar 12 2:00pm

AIS Vs Adelaide United
AIS Athletics Track, Canberra

Sun 4 Mar 12 11:00am

Melbourne Victory FC Vs Perth Glory
Kingston Heath, Cheltenham

Sun 4 Mar 12 4:00pm

Central Coast Mariners Vs Sydney FC
Plum Park, Central Coast

Sun 4 Mar 12 4:30pm

Newcastle Jets FC Vs Melbourne Heart
Adamstown Oval, Newcastle

Results

Newcastle Jets 1-2 Adelaide United
Perth Glory 2-4 Brisbane Roar
Gold Coast Utd Vs Melbourne Victory
Sydney FC 1-2 AIS

NYL Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	D	P
1 CC Mariners	17	11	2	4	41	16	25	35
2 Perth Glory	17	9	5	3	36	30	6	32
3 Brisbane Roar	17	9	4	5	50	33	17	31
4 Sydney FC	17	7	3	7	40	31	9	24
5 Gold Coast Utd	15	7	3	5	33	30	3	24
6 Melbourne Heart	17	7	2	8	32	35	-3	23
7 Newcastle Jets	16	5	5	6	25	26	-1	20
8 Adelaide United	17	5	7	2	26	33	-7	20
9 AIS	17	5	11	27	55	28	16	
10 Melb Victory	16	3	2	11	14	34	-21	11

Brendan Gonano for the AIS had a huge chance to take the lead just like Williams but his header too was saved by Norval. But the goalkeeper couldn't do anything about Joshua Barresi's brilliant left foot volley on 83 minutes which took all three points.

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Pre-Season Cups

North sneak through in final rehearsal

By Roy Hay

North Geelong scored in the last minute to beat Corio by three goals to two in a very entertaining rehearsal for next week's grand final in the City of Greater Geelong Cup at Bell Park Sports Club last Friday night.

In their previous games the two sides had only conceded a single goal between them, but Corio got off to a flying start after only four minutes.

Elton Savice outstripped the defence on the left and when Mijo Marinovic's shot was blocked Andrew Palmieri followed up to beat Daniel Zilic in the North goal.

North hit back with a series of probing attacks and following a corner kick Alek Kitanovski in the Corio goal flapped at the ball and Justin Hanns lobbed it back over him for the equaliser.

It was open, end-to-end football and Corio took the lead once again when a long free kick by Dusko Novakovic confused the North defence and Hanns got a slight touch which took it past his own keeper as Arjan Veljan of Corio dived at the loose ball.

Corio held the lead till ten minutes into the second half when Robbie Zadworny broke clear down the centre and ran on to score easily.

It looked very much as if the game would end in a draw, though North squandered a series of chances.

Fikret Husanovic even got round substitute keeper Simon Smyth and fired the ball right along the goal line, but it just cleared the far post.

Then in the final minute, North won another corner and Nathan Long had a free header for his sixth goal of the competition.

If the final lives up to the excitement of this game then the fans will be delighted.

In the second match Geelong and Geelong Rangers put on their usual tightly contested derby match.

Neither side could score in the first half, though Geelong's Daniel Wilson intercepted an attempted clearance and fired the ball past Rangers' keeper, Hayden van der Chys.

The keeper managed to scramble back and stop the ball nearly on the goal line as Michael Temelkovski slid in.

Rangers welcomed back two veterans, Troy Hardy, the competition's all-time leading scorer, and Scott Davidson, but it was James Blackburn who was the hero with two excellent goals in the second half.

The first came when he took advantage of a rebound from the keeper after his initial effort had been blocked, but the second was fine strike from distance.

He might have had a hat-trick but was just offside as he finished off a pass from Hardy.

On Sunday Surfcoast played Bell Park

for a spot in the third-place match. If either team won it would jump above Geelong, while a draw might have been enough for Bell Park as it had a better goal difference.

As it happened Park won comfortably in the end by three goals to one.

Joe Lawrence put the home team in front after only eight minutes, but Jack Taylor equalised for Surf Coast in the 50th minute.

Park took only five minutes to regain the lead through Matthew Hagebols and Chris Newman made certain of the points with four minutes left to play.

Geelong Rangers took the field against a much changed Corio line-up at 7.10 pm.

Robbie Noggler decided to rest those players who were on yellow cards, and give a game to a couple of players whom he thought needed to improve their fitness.

Rangers had no inhibitions and wanted to prove that they could back up after their good win on Friday over Geelong.

So there was really no doubt how the match would turn out, and Rangers got home comfortably by three goals to nil scored by Ryan Calder, Stuart Begg and Colin Hamilton.

So next Sunday Rangers will play Bell Park at 3 pm to decide third place, followed by the grand final between North Geelong and Corio at 5 pm.

By Russ Gibbs

Loop Federation Cup holders Belconnen United kicked off the defence of their trophy with a surprise 1-2 loss to ACTAS as the women's pre-season cup competition kicked off. The ACT Academy of Sport secured a shock victory over the 2011 treble champions with a late winner doing the damage leaving Ray Junna and his team in pole position in the group.

Weston Creek join ACTAS as early pool leaders with a 2-1 win over Canberra FC. Over in Pool B Woden Valley hammered hapless Goulburn Strikers 27-0 in the most one-sided match in recent loop Federation Cup history with Ashleigh Palombi scoring nine whilst Canberra Olympic tasted defeat on their return to women's football when they were beaten 3-1 by Gungahlin United.

Pool A
Belconnen United 1 (Amy Wilson 67') **ACTAS 2 (Leanne Pompeani 46', Meg McLaughlin 81')**

ACTAS sprang the surprise of the opening round of the loop Federation

Cup when they defeated holders Belconnen United 2-1 in an exciting match at ANU Willows. A late goal from Meg McLaughlin proved the difference as the striker alertly responded to a save from Jocelyn Mara to slot the ball into the net from close range for the match-winner.

Weston Creek 2 (Anna Bennett 75', Jess O'Brien 80') **Canberra FC 1 (Jennifer Bisset 86')**

Weston Creek may have prevailed in this fixture and claimed the priceless three points to give them a major boost in hopes of qualifying but only Canberra FC will know how they managed to do so as the Deakin-based team under Coach David Goldstein were the better side for vast swathes of the match.

Woden Valley 27 (Ashleigh Palombi (9), Brittany Palombi (5), Ellie Raymond (5), Sophie Kochinos (3), Anissa Tann (2), Sophie Velzen (2), Bronte Carlin) **Goulburn Strikers 0**

Facing perennial Tradies Women's Premier League outfit Woden Valley at the best of times is a daunting prospect. To do so as a State League One club, missing three key players

through suspension and only being able to field ten players, which did not include a regular goalkeeper, was tantamount to football suicide and the Goulburn Strikers were made to pay by a ruthless Woden Valley who opened up their loop Federation Cup campaign with a scarcely believable 27-0 victory. Amazingly, if it hadn't been for the resoluteness of Rachel Ross and Amielea Friend, who spent forty-five minutes each between the sticks, the score line may well have been even worse for the beleaguered visitors.

Canberra Olympic 1 (Kim Morgan 72') **Gungahlin United 3 (Brittany Tully 20', Hope Wilkins 77', 87')**

Canberra Olympic's hopes of claiming a victory in their first match back as a member of the ACT Premier League elite were dashed by a brace of late goals from substitute Hope Wilkins as Gungahlin United won 3-1 on the AIS synthetic surface. Wilkins, who joined Gungahlin this season from Belwest Foxes, came off the bench to turn the tide of the match and break the hearts of the Olympic team and management with a double of some quality to seal the points.



Robert Zadworny of North Geelong makes a break, watched by top scorer Nathan Long (2). Photo: Roy Hay.



Fed Cup action between ACTAS and Belconnen. Photo: RUSS GIBBS



Couch Potato

* ALL TIMES ARE AEDT



SBS ONE
Sunday March 4th
10:30 AM FIFA World Cup 2014 Magazine
11:00 AM Les Murray's Football Feature -
12:00 PM UEFA Champions League Magazine Program

Monday 5th March
11:05 PM The World Game

Wednesday March 7th
06:30 AM UEFA Champions League - Round of 16

Thursday March 8th
06:30 AM UEFA Champions League - Round of 16 Live (2nd Leg)
11:05 PM UEFA Champions League Hour

Friday March 9th
06:45 AM UEFA Europa League - Round of 16 Live (1st Leg)

SBS TWO
Monday March 5th
09:30 PM The World Game

Wednesday March 7th
09:40 PM UEFA Champions League - Round of 16 match (2nd Leg).

Thursday March 8th
08:30 PM UEFA Champions League Hour

Saturday March 10th
07:00 PM UEFA Europa League - Round of 16 match (1st Leg).



Saturday 03rd March
06:30 am Bundesliga Weekly Highlights

Sunday 04th March
02:30 am Serie A Fiorentina v Lazio
04:30 am The Serie A Highlights Show
05:00 am Bundesliga Weekly Highlights
07:30 am The Serie A Highlights Show

Monday 05th March
04:00 am Serie A Juventus v Milan
10:30 am Serie A Fiorentina v Lazio

Tuesday 06th March
06:00 am Serie A Palermo v Milan

Wednesday 07th March
03:00 am Liverpool TV Carling Cup Final Liverpool v Cardiff
06:00 am Serie A Roma v Lazio
08:00 am Magic Of The FA Cup Leeds United's Greatest Goals

Thursday 08th March
02:30 am FA Cup Classics Aston Villa v Leeds 4th Round 00/01

03:00 am Bundesliga Bayer Leverkusen v Bayern Munich
05:00 am Bundesliga Weekly Highlights
06:00 am The Serie A Highlights Show
12:30 pm Bundesliga Weekly Highlights

Friday 09th March
03:00 am Arsenal TV Liverpool v Arsenal



ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE LIVE
Times listed are 7 minutes prior to kick-offs.

Week 30
Sat Mar 3 Liverpool v Arsenal 11:30 pm
Sun Mar 4 Man City v Bolton 1.53 am Fox 1
Sun Mar 4 West Brom v Chelsea 1.53 am

Fox 2

Sun Mar 4 Blackburn v Aston Villa 1.53 am

Viewers Choice

Sun Mar 4 QPR v Everton 1.53 am

Viewers Choice

Sun Mar 4 Stoke v Norwich 1.53 am

Viewers Choice

Sun Mar 4 Wigan v Swansea 1.53 am

Viewers Choice

Sun Mar 4 N'castle v S'derland 10:53 pm

Fox 1

Mon Mar 5 Fulham v Wolves 12:58 am

Fox 1

Mon Mar 5 Tottenham v Man Utd 3.03 am

Fox 1

ENGLISH FOOTBAL LEAGUE

Sat Mar 3 Blackpool v Hull 6:30 am

Fox 2

Sun Mar 4 Leeds v Southampton 4:00 am

Fox 1

Sun Mar 4 Cardiff v West Ham 11:41 pm

Fox 3

A-LEAGUE LIVE

Fri Mar 2 Brisbane v Melb Heart 7:30 pm Fox 2

Sat Mar 3 Melbourne v Newcastle 5:00 pm Fox 1

Sat Mar 3 Mariners v Sydney 7:30 pm Fox 1

Sun Mar 4 Phoenix v Gold Coast 2:30 pm Fox 1

FOX SPORTS FC

Every Tuesday 8:30 pm



Alvaro Rodriguez's

NAME: Panama

CAPITAL: Panama City

POPULATION: (2010 approx.) 3,405,813

CONFEDERATION: CONCACAF

INTERNATIONAL HONOURS: CONCACAF Gold Cup runners-up 2005; Copa Centroamericana winners 2009

FIFA WORLD RANKING: 49th

CONCACAF GOLD CUP APPEARANCES: 1963, 1965, 1993, 2005-2011

WHO ARE YA?

The Republic of Panama is situated in southern Central America, bordered by Costa Rica to the north and Colombia to the south. The colonial history of Panama is markedly different from that of its fellow Central American nations (Belize excluded), in that it was not part of the 'Viceroyalty of New Spain' dominion that encompassed the rest of modern-day Central America during Spanish rule, rather it was part of the neighbouring 'New Granada' territory comprising modern-day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Trinidad & Tobago.

From 1538 when it was formally annexed by the Spaniards, the Isthmus (the name colloquially given to the land due to its own, dual Atlantic/Pacific coastlines and the fact it bridges Central and South America) served as a key part of New Granada due to its geographical juxtaposition.

All kinds of trade, legal or not passed through the land, most unsavoury of the illicit being the slave trade that in time superseded the indigenous Chibcha Indians (also found in Colombia) with Africans enslaved by the Spanish traders.

The prosperity of the Isthmus within New Granada also made it a target of rival imperial powers throughout the centuries - the Dutch, English and for a brief time Scottish imperialists too! - and so with that in mind it was hardly surprising that in 1821, as Mexico and the future nations of Central America gained independence from Spain, the Isthmus' own cry for freedom was stifled by Colombia, which eventually annexed Panama, as it became known, as a province - never mind Colombia at that time was itself a mere part of the nascent, Bolivarian 'Republic of Greater Colombia'.

When Greater Colombia crumbled, Panamanian sovereignty was again tested by remaining to stay on as a Colombian province, finally gaining its freedom in 1903.

However the geographic advantages of the new republic were not lost on the United States, which negotiated the construction and administration of a canal linking the oceans either side of the country; the Panama Canal.

Although the country's politics were quick to mirror those of its neighbours (active oppression by the Right, comprising of the military and social elite towards the Left-leaning lower/middle classes), Panama took a sharp turn in the 1960s that made it the envy of its neighbours: a Leftist dictator, Omar Torrijos came to power in 1968 and enacted the very reforms being demanded and denied elsewhere in Central America: land redistribution to peasants in particular. Despite his progressive populism, Torrijos tragically died in a plane crash in 1981 - to this day Panamanians believe it was no accident, he had effectively been assassinated but by who (rumours suggest political enemies driven underground, or even the CIA despite his good relations with the US) remains unclear.

After a succession of caretaker military governors (the term President had been set aside during this time), Manuel Noriega became head of state in 1983, and within a decade had lowered the country's colours with rife corruption of all kinds, not least his personal involvement with Colombian drug cartels - all the more controversial given Noriega's secret life as a CIA operative. He was captured during the US' subsequent occupation of his country in 1989, and tried for drug-related and money-laundering offences. He was returned to Panama last year to serve out the remaining 20 years of his sentence after earlier incarceration in the US and France.

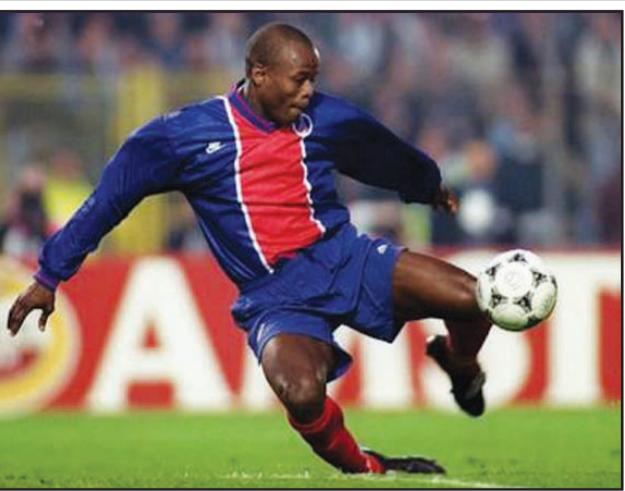
Guillermo Endara succeeded Noriega as the country's first civilian president since 1968 in 1990, and since then Panama has become a stable member of the Central American and wider-Latin American sphere.

SO WHAT YOU DONE?

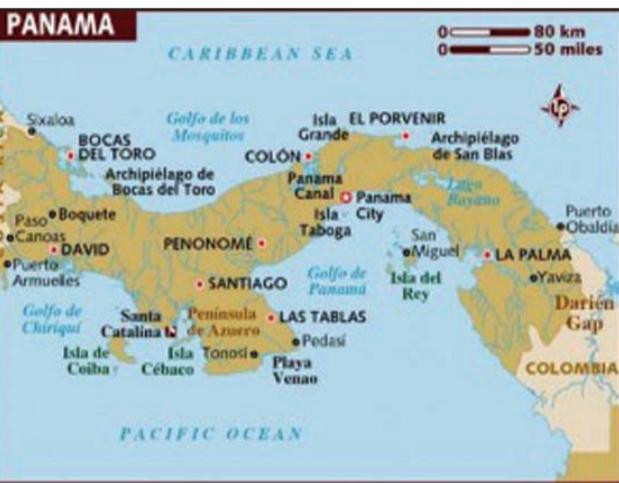
Although traditionally boxing, baseball and basketball are the country's main sporting pursuits, football has a modest tradition in Panama that is ever-growing due to the country's increasing footballing profile. Although it is yet to qualify for the World Cup, Panama has atoned for its erratic pre-2005 Gold Cup record by having qualified for every edition of the continental showpiece since, most notably losing the 2005 final on penalties to the US and bowing out in the semis of last year's edition, again to the USA. It has however won the regional Copa Centroamericana (formerly the UNCAF Nations Cup) in 2009, which serves as Central America's qualifiers for the Gold Cup proper.

In terms of players, the Panamanian NT

Planet Football Panama



The great Julio Dely Valdés during his PSG days



Just in case the GPS isn't working...

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Guillermo Endara succeeded Noriega as the country's first civilian president since 1968 in 1990, and since then Panama has become a stable member of the Central American and wider-Latin American sphere.

BIG CLUBS

Tauro FC is one of the country's most-decorated clubs with 10 titles despite only being in existence since 1984, joining the current national league (Liga Panameña de Fútbol) in its inaugural 1988 season. CD Plaza Amador (established in 1955, one of the country's oldest-surviving clubs) boasts five titles (the last won in 2005); the 1994-founded Árabe Unido have six titles as well as 3 appearances at continental level (most notably reaching the quarterfinals of the 2009/10 CONCACAF Champions League), and finally San Francisco ('St. Francis' in Spanish, not to do with the US city!) FC on 7 title wins, most recently the 2011 Clausura title won against Chorrillo FC on May 14th last year. San Francisco have also graced the CCL in recent years, albeit eliminated at the group-stage of the 2008/09 edition.

REYP YOUR COLORS

Nicknamed both Los Canaleros (The Canal Men) and La Marea Roja (The Red Tide), the Panamanian NT wears a predominantly-red home strip with white trims, hence the 'Red Tide' name; the away has the colours inverted as well as additional blue designs. As for the clubs, Tauro wear black and white stripes w/white shorts and socks befitting their 'Albinegra' (The Black & White) nickname; Plaza Amador wear a blue and white top w/red and white-trimmed shorts and socks; Árabe Unido wear an all-blue strip with white trims; San Francisco FC

wear a predominantly ochre-red top with white and black trims while finally Chorrillo wear a yellow and purplish-blue kit.

MATCHWINNERS

Julio Dely Valdés is undoubtedly Panama's greatest-ever player, a striker whose career spanned over 15 years and saw him play for clubs as diverse as lower-tier Argentine side CA Deportivo Paraguayo (a Paraguayan-community backed club) to Uruguayan giants Club Nacional (current home to Australian WC-qualifying nemesis Álvaro Recoba as well as Aussie-born Uruguayan striker Richard Porta), and from there Europe beckoned, stints with Serie A side Cagliari and in Spain with Málaga and Real Oviedo (then in La Liga) either side of a 64-game, 23-goal stint with French powerhouse Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) between 1995 and '97, during which time the club twice finished second at home and became only the second French club to win a continental trophy by winning the UEFA Cup-Winners' Cup in 1996.

After his stint at Málaga he rejoined Nacional in Uruguay before returning home to coach the senior and junior national sides on-and-off before taking the senior NT post full-time in 2010.

His twin brother Jorge also enjoyed a colourful career abroad, albeit mostly spent in Japan after fruitless South American stints (including alongside Julio at Paraguayo and Nacional); in the J-League's formative years he played for Consadole Sapporo and Cerezo Osaka as well as Kawasaki Frontale either side of a brief stint Stateside with the MLS' Colorado Rapids, earning 34 caps and scoring 13 goals for his country (Julio played 2 less games for Panama, but scored 9 more goals in his own international career) along way.

Of the current crop, defender Felipe Baloy has played for Brazil's Gremio and Atlético Paranaense in-between sojourns in Colombia with Envigado and CD Independiente Medellín, and in Mexico with Monterrey, Club América and Santos Laguna (his current club); midfielder Gabriel Gómez plies his trade in the MLS with Philadelphia Union after stints in Colombia, Portugal, Cyprus and Mexico; striker Blas Pérez (nicknamed Super Ratón, 'Mighty Mouse') also plays in the US top-flight with FC Dallas after also spending time in Colombia and Mexico as well as a brief spell at Spanish side Hércules; fellow striker Luis Tejada ('El Matador') plays for current Peruvian champions Juan Aurich, while defender Luis Henríquez is one of the few currently-European-based Canaleros, having been on the books of Polish side Lech Poznań since 2007.

SO WHAT NOW?

The Canaleros will want to build on their good showings at the last few Gold Cups by making a serious charge on the World Cup qualifiers although their assignment is a tricky one, having been drawn in third-round Group C with regional power Honduras as well as the not-too-shabby Canadians and Cubans.

Nevertheless if their star players click and aim for at least draws in both their clashes against the Hondurans, it would give them the confidence to take on their other group foes with added swagger.

Whilst qualifying for the final Hexagonal group-stage would probably be enough for them, the Canaleros' recent showings on the continental stage suggest they should play above themselves often in order for their regional rivals to accept them as permanent contenders.

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Jim Fraser

BLAST FROM THE PAST

With Roy Hay

Australia has had some wonderful goalkeepers over the years from George Cartwright and Jimmy McNabb who began the tradition in the 1920s and 1930s to Mark Schwarzer who holds the Socceroo position today. It is arguable that over his long career that Jim Fraser has had as much influence on the game as any of them.

He helped Australia qualify for the World Cup for the first time in 1974, played at the top level for Budapest St George in its glory days in the 1970s and in recent years has coached many of the top keepers in the land at his International Goalkeepers' Academy in Sydney. He has also been the specialist goalkeeping coach at Sydney FC in the A-League. His enthusiasm and professionalism have communicated themselves to a legion of young and not so young keepers including Clint Bolton at Melbourne Heart and Liam Reddy at Sydney FC.

Born in 1948 in Sydney, his dad was an ice hockey goaltender, but young Jim made his game football. He started at Polonia and his talent was recognised early as he was selected as a member of the Australian World Cup squad for the qualifiers in 1969, behind the incumbent Ron Corry. Fraser went to St George in 1970 where he broke his wrist in 1971 and spent some time at Canterbury on loan after he recovered. St George tried a couple of other keepers but

when Jack Reilly decided to return to Melbourne, Jimmy Fraser regained his spot at St George. When World Cup qualification got under way in 1973, Ron Corry was still the number one keeper with Reilly pressing him close. Jim Fraser's performances for St George could not be ignored and he got his first full cap at Olympic Park in Melbourne against Bulgaria on 18 February 1973. Though the Socceroos lost two-nil against what was their World Cup team, Fraser showed that he could handle the job.

After Australia was held to a surprise three-all draw by New Zealand, Fraser was given the number one spot against Iraq on 18 March. He kept a clean sheet as the Socceroos held out Iraq in scoreless draw. A six-nil thrashing of Indonesia saw Australian through the first stage, a point and goal difference ahead of Iraq. The next opponent was Iran and Fraser once again denied the opposition as Australia ran away with a three-nil win. The second leg in Tehran was a different story as Iran scored twice through Parviz Ghelikhhani in just over half an hour. It was back to the wall from then on, with Fraser putting up the shutters once again.

Then came home and away matches against South Korea. Both were drawn, the first scoreless, the second a fightback from a two-nil deficit. While Branko Buljevic and Ray Baartz got the credit for the goals, Fraser's patience, skill and positioning ensured

First-class Socceroo shot-stopper



Jimmy Fraser makes a finger-tip save against Iraq in 1973. Source: Laurie Schwab collection, Deakin University Library.

no further goals against and so the final place at the World cup had to be decided by a third match in Hong Kong. Everyone knows about Jimmy Mackay's 70th minute thunderbolt, but fewer appreciate the unflappable keeper's performance. Les Murray thought it was the best goalkeeping performance he had ever seen. So Australia was all set for the trip of a lifetime to West Germany.

Unfortunately Jimmy Fraser found he could not abandon his security dog business and had to pull out of the squad, handing his place back to Jack Reilly. Virtually all of the Australians were part-timers in 1974 and Manfred Schaefer who ran a milk

delivery service had missed one tour and threatened to leave another after his financial arrangements were not honoured by the Australian Soccer Federation.

Jimmy Fraser amassed 10 caps for Australia, and represented New South Wales against several visiting teams and in interstate matches. When he hung up his boots in 1978 he began a long-running coaching career at a host of clubs and with the national and state teams and eventually set up the International Goalkeepers' Academy in 2000 with the aid of a number of investors and supporters including that well known soccer nut, would-be keeper and film

superstar Anthony La Paglia. Pierre Littbarski who coached Sydney FC to the A-League premiership in 2006 is a great fan. The last words on Jimmy Fraser should rest with him.

'The work you did with the goalkeepers was outstanding. Clint Bolton became a real consistent player and real personality. With your help he developed his physical skills a lot, but more important for me was, that he went from a "one man show" to a real leader. This was especially in the final series a big factor and gave us the championship, because Clint Bolton played very good.'

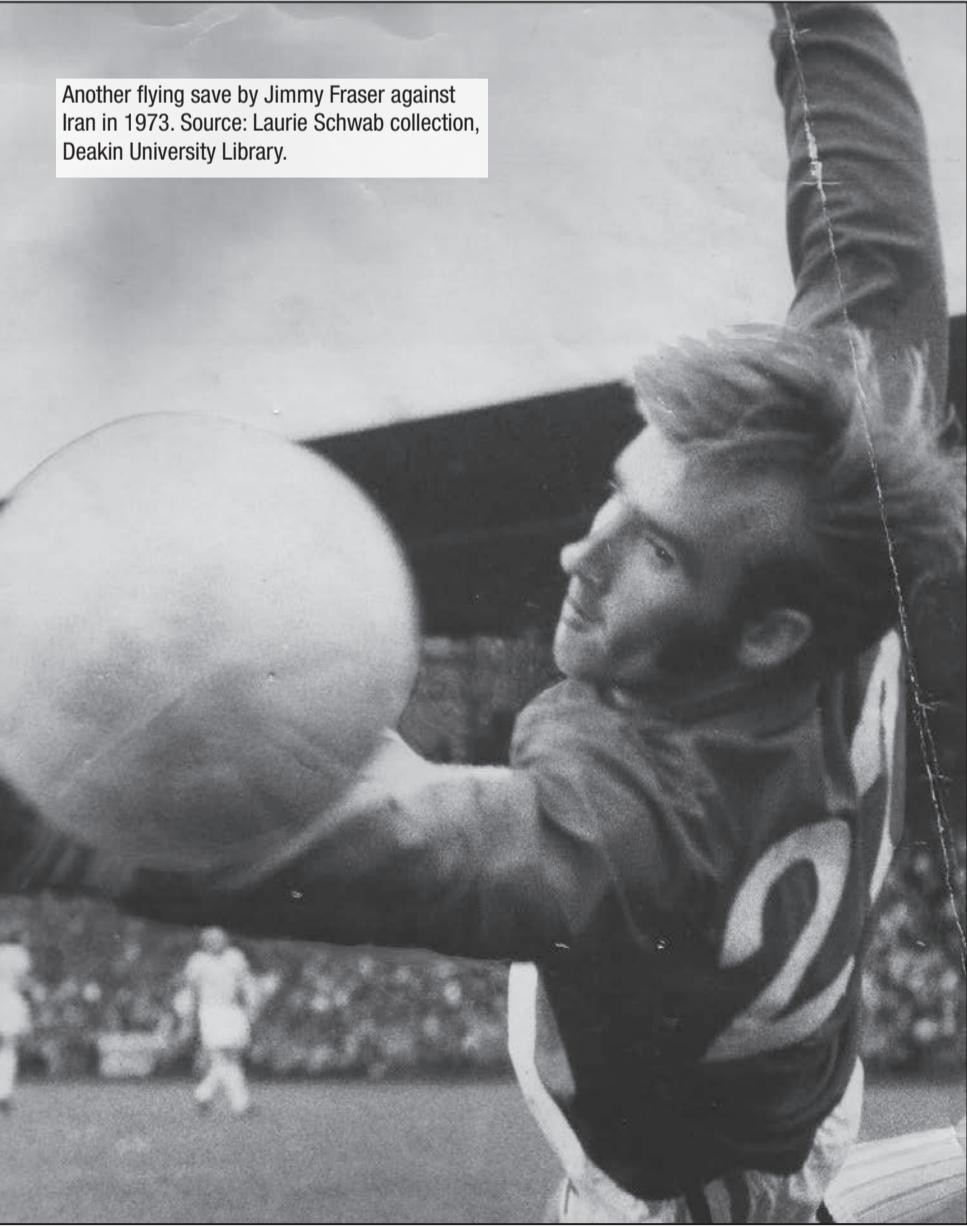
Our second keeper Justin Pasfield improved his basic skills a lot in

one season. Also your work with the young keepers, who joined us regularly in our sessions with Sydney FC, was very effective. That proves, that you can coach players of all ages.

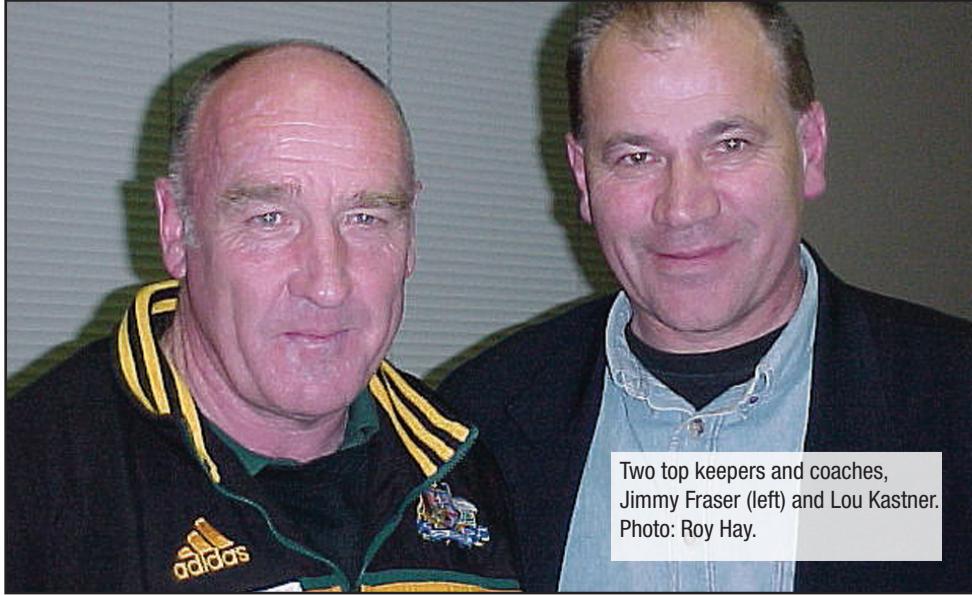
The most impressive point for me was, that you were capable to do some coaching beside your goalkeeper training. The daily training, especially with the defenders (passing, heading, kicking, throw in, tactical training for the 4-back line, etc.) was fantastic. The players loved it and for me it was a big help. Goalkeeper coaches should not focus only on the keepers.'

Says it all, really.

Another flying save by Jimmy Fraser against Iran in 1973. Source: Laurie Schwab collection, Deakin University Library.



Star Quality: Jim Fraser and Anthony La Paglia. Photo: International Goalkeepers' Academy website



Two top keepers and coaches, Jimmy Fraser (left) and Lou Kastner. Photo: Roy Hay.

Is Victory in sight for 'Sully'?

MACKENZIE AT LARGE

With Craig MacKenzie



LAST August he hit a stunning 30-metre volley in Belgrade that underpinned Shamrock Rovers' defeat of Partizan to become the first League of Ireland team to reach the Champions League proper.

Last December he played at White Hart Lane and tried valiantly to keep Steven Pienaar and Jermain Defoe at bay.

But last Sunday at a glamorous awards ceremony in the RTE TV studios in Dublin he was nowhere to be seen when his name was read out as the 2011 League of Ireland Player of the Year.

That's because Pat Sullivan, the right back known throughout Irish football simply as "Sully", was recovering from a pre-season friendly roughly 12,000 miles away.

A few hours before claiming the prestigious Irish award he'd been strutting his stuff for newly promoted VPL outfit Southern Stars at Park Avenue Reserve in the Melbourne suburb of Doncaster.

Sullivan has signed for Southern Stars and linked up once more with Darragh Ryan. They played together at UCD (University College Dublin) from 2002-04 and again at Cork City in 2008.

And that's not the only football contact he's linked up with in Melbourne for he's been training regularly with Melbourne Victory under former Shamrock Rovers assistant manager and Victory head coach Jim Magilton.

In fact I've been told that Victory has been trying to register Sullivan as an injury replacement for captain Adrian Leijer who recently underwent arthroscopic surgery on his left hip and is out for the remainder of the A-League season.

Believe it or not there are more Irish players there than you could shake a shillelagh at.

But the most interesting question posed by Sullivan's presence at Victory training concerns Magilton's future with the Melbourne franchise and perhaps Sullivan knows something we don't.

Have Magilton and the Victory board already agreed on a full-time coaching deal given that his current tenure is on a caretaker basis until season's end? Sullivan increasingly looks like a recruit in waiting and the plan right now is for him to play for Southern Stars in the upcoming VPL season then join Victory officially during the 2012-13 A-League pre-season.

One thing is certain. If Victory signs Sullivan he's going to give youngsters Mathew Foschini and Petar Franjic one hell of a run for their money in the race to clinch the right-back spot. His CV suggests nothing less.

Sullivan will turn 30 in October and from all reports is at the peak of his footballing powers.

He was with UCD for two seasons before joining Drogheda United

(where ex-Dandenong Thunder and new Oakleigh recruit Steven Gray was a teammate) and winning his one and only FAI Cup final medal in 2005 beating Cork City 2-0 at Lansdowne Road in front of a crowd of almost 25,000.

He joined Longford Town in 2007 and reached the FAI Cup final again only to lose to Cork City this time. Sullivan was sent off in that final.

He then joined former manager Alan Mathews at Cork City in 2008 and on 31 July 2009 signed a two and a half year deal with Shamrock Rovers.

Sullivan won back-to-back League of Ireland titles with Rovers in 2010 and 2011.

He also has won the all-Ireland Setanta Cup on three occasions – in 2006 (with Drogheda United), 2008 (Cork City) and 2010 (Shamrock Rovers). Sullivan quit Rovers in January saying that he planned to travel around Australia for a year.

He also said that his departure was a lifestyle rather than a football decision and told the club that he would have gone 12 months earlier if not for his contractual obligations.

"I don't live and breathe football. I probably did at one point, but certainly not anymore," he told the Irish Daily Star newspaper.

"I don't really watch too much football outside of training and playing the game."

"I could come back in a year or two and be more than happy to play. I'm sure I have another few good years in my legs. I just don't know right now.

"The European run kind of had the potential to sway me. There was a bit of wanting to stay and trying to do it all again.

"It was a very tough decision. Even though I had it in my mind to do it before any of this started, it still does play on you.

"You wonder if you are making the right decision or if you might regret it. And there is a good chance that I will regret it.

"But at the moment I'm leaving on a high and that's not the worst thing that could happen," he said.

And there will be no assimilation problems for Sullivan at Southern Stars albeit that he's joined a Turkish-backed club.

Believe it or not there are more Irish players there than you could shake a shillelagh at.

Sullivan brings the number of Irishmen in the first team squad to eight. Apart from close friend Ryan there are Kieran Fitzgerald, John Fitzgerald, Luke Fitzpatrick, Alan Mulcahy, Alan Kearney and Mark Leech.

And manager Dean Hennessy, assistant Shannon Kennedy and first team coach Joe Carroll are hopeful that at the end of the club's first ever season in the VPL all those Irish eyes will be smiling.

Wright takes on Tevez

BAILEY Wright played against Argentinian superstar Carlos Tevez on Tuesday and took it all in his stride.

The Langwarrin 19-year-old lined up for Preston North End's reserves in a Central League Cup clash away to Manchester City at Carrington and



Pat Sullivan (foreground) of Shamrock Rovers is challenged by Tottenham's Niko Kranjar.

had a fine game in his side's 3-1 win.

"Daniel Devine, Brian McLean, Seánan Clucas and Bailey Wright coped well with the threat of Tevez and all contributed to a terrific game," said Preston assistant manager John Dreyer.

The game was a closed-doors contest but there was a massive media horde eager to report on Tevez's first run for City since his fallout with manager Roberto Mancini, a rift sparked by the Argentinian's refusal to warm up as a substitute in a Champions League match at Bayern Munich in September.

Preston, Man City, Tranmere Rovers

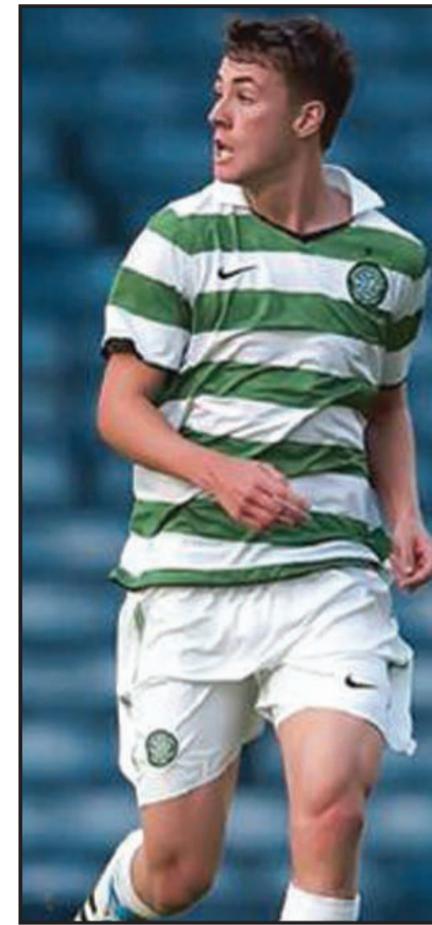
and Morecombe are in Group A in the League Cup with Preston leading the group.

Preston also tops the table in Central League West.

Wright has been a regular in Preston's reserves this season but still has his eyes firmly fixed on a first team place.

Since Phil Brown's departure and the arrival of Graham Westley as manager, Wright has been developed into a left back rather than a central defender.

He was never in the frame during Brown's reign as the former Hull City boss opted for experienced players at



Jackson Irvine – praised by Neil Lennon after playing against Huddersfield.

the back in a vain attempt to halt the club's slide.

Irvine impresses Lennon

THE news just keeps getting better for Celtic under-19s captain Jackson Irvine.

A fortnight back the Lysterfield teenager was part of a development squad that travelled to Huddersfield for a friendly.

Named among the substitutes, he ended up playing the majority of the match after replacing the injured Emilio Izaguirre after 15 minutes.

And Irvine made an impact alongside the likes of Ki, Paddy McCourt and

Kris Commons, getting his name on the scoresheet thanks to a Commons' free-kick in the second half.

But Irvine's header was cancelled out in the closing minute by the hosts as the match ended all-square.

"That was great," Irvine told the Celtic View after the match. "I wasn't supposed to be on so early but unfortunately Emilio had to go off after 10 or 15 minutes, so I ended up playing most of the game."

"For Marcus Fraser and I, two young centre-halves, to play with such an experienced team around us – three or four World Cup players and seven full internationalists – was an unbelievable experience and it was great to get myself on the scoresheet."

"I didn't have to do too much, just direct it at goal as Kris Commons put all the pace on the cross. So that was really great."

"We were unfortunate not to come away with the win. They hit a great shot from 25 yards right at the end but it was a great experience to play among those players, especially in front of the gaffer."

"The tempo of the passing and movement is the biggest difference."

Celtic manager Neil Lennon was delighted with the performance of his young defenders and told Irvine and Fraser as much in the dressing room after the match.

Irvine remains in with a chance of making his first team debut this season. And the turmoil enveloping Glasgow rival Rangers won't do his chances any harm.

It's almost certain that Celtic will wrap up the league title before the end of the season presenting Lennon with the opportunity to fast-forward the development of the more promising players in the club's second-tier squad.

Irvine also has the chance to lead the young Hoops to another domestic double. They currently lie seven points behind Hearts with two games in hand and a superior goal difference.

They also will feature in a semi-final of the SFA Youth Cup when they travel to St Mirren Park to take on the hosts at 1pm on Sunday 1 April. The other semi-finalists are Dundee United and Queen of the South.



Preston North End's Bailey Wright (right) in pursuit of Manchester City star Carlos Tevez.



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CELLAR DWELLARS SHOW SIGNS OF LIFE

By Jimmy Soufis

Metropolitan FC 9-7 FC Richmond

To kick off the card 4th placed Metropolitan took on cellar dwellers Richmond. The night did not start well for the killer bees as Alja Redzepovic opened the scoring to put Richmond on the back foot. Taylan Aksoy equalized soon after, Before Dino Redzepovic put Metropolitan ahead once again.

If not for Richmond shot stopper Chris Sagewood it could have got a lot worse as he made a couple of fine saves to keep Richmond in it. It was Aksoy again who equalized for the bees before quick fire braces from Tomoslav Grigic and Alexander Stevanovic suddenly had the sky blues away to a 6-2 lead. It was that man Aksoy though causing all the headaches for the sky blues as he completed his hat-trick.

Metropolitan got on another goal scoring run with Izzad Spajidic, Jusuf Avdic & Alja Redzepovic seemingly killing off the tie. Despite being 9-3 behind Richmond were not giving up as they almost sparked an amazing comeback with Ninos Emmanuel got on the board before 3 more goals to Aksoy gave the bees a sniff. In the end though it was too little too late as Richmond stayed bottom but for a resurgent Metropolitan they stay 4th but move clear of the chasing pack.

Pascoe Vale FC 4-3 Ashburton FC

After knocking off the invincibles on Friday night Pascoe Vale were not expecting a tough encounter with the Green Machine Ashburton but they got more then they bargained for.

Early on, the big Frenchman Sofiane Soufi gave the green machine a shock lead with a sublime chip just minutes later before he doubled it with a quality finish.

Soon after Rodrigo Evangelista had the green machine 3-0 ahead with a well taken free kick with Soufi as the lion's title dream was hanging by a thread. No matter what the lions threw at their opposition they could not break their defense with Harry Kitharidis having another superb game in goals. Behind 3-0 at half time lions manager Paul Vidic gave his team a massive talking too and they came out better for it in the second half with Mark Burton converting a beautiful chip to drag Pascoe Vale back into the match.

Andre Caro then scored a cracking goal to have Pascoe Vale within striking distance of their opponents, and if not for 2 world class saves by lions shot stopper Dianaosh Raoulzadeh the game could have been all but over. An amazing through ball from Caro set up the equalizer for Brenno Polatti. With the game seemingly heading for a draw Pascoe Vale won a corner and had all their men forward and it was only fitting that a half court thunderbolt from the lions goalkeeper Raoulzadeh caused the crowd to go wild and within a matter of seconds he went from hero to villain being sent off although that did little to dampen the lions mood as they stayed in second place while Ashburton drop into 7th but could be proud of their efforts.

North Melbourne FC 5-4 FC Prahran

After seeing their arch rivals grind out a win North Melbourne knew they had to bounce back from their first defeat in 40 games while for Prahran a win would severely dent their vipers title charge. It was the vipers who got off to the better start after a defensive error from Marcos Barbosa gave Mirza Pedic the opener. New signing Ahmed Azzam had an immediate



Mirza Pedic (left) & Alex Jankovic (right) proved the difference in their top of the table clash with Prahran.



Aden Alicevic (right) single handedly tore Fitzroy apart getting another hat-trick to add to his tally.



Ivan Zilic showed why he is one of the most feared strikers in the premiership scoring 4 times in his sides win over Brunswick.



Andre Caro (centre) lead his side to a hard fought last gasp win over Ashburton

impact as he set up Maxi Avram for the opener which had the player manager doing cartwheels.

While Prahran celebrated their equalizer Pedic scored a screamer to give the vipers back the lead. In an action packed game Barbosa equalized for the warriors with an easy finish. Immediately after that Thiago Priori scored from the restart and before he even got back into his own half Cameron Holmes scored from Prahran restart. Not long after a Resit Culcuglu toe poke had the wanderers 4-3 ahead and in sight of victory although it was the somewhat forgotten figure at North Melbourne Alex Jankovic who proved to be the hero for the vipers with 2 goals late on winning the somewhat crazy game for his side and keeping up their slender lead at the top of the league while for Prahran they could almost forget about a title challenge this season blowing their chance at glory but still staying 3rd and in hope of a cup run.

Mickleham FC 3-7 FC Essendon

After 2 action packed game this had a lot to live up to as a new look Mickleham took on strugglers Essendon. It got off to the perfect start for the hammers with Koteski opening the scoring. However Essendon responded in style with 3 quick goals through Diego Assaeda, Udit Dhawan & Ignat Filipovic. A defensive error from the usually composed Vlado Zoric let Hossein Mirza in for the hammers second. Not long after Dhawan grabbed his second of the night. Assaeda had a chance to finish off the game but spurned his chance from the 5th foul penalty spot. Surposki got his sides 3rd goal of the night but their chance of a comeback was short lived as Assaeda doubled up and Zoric scored 2 late goals to put some polish on the result the much needed win sent the wanderers back up into 5th while the loss keeps the hammers in 11th spot and in danger of relegation.

Fitzroy FC 1-4 Brimbank FC

As the night rolled on the next game

saw 2 sides that have had up and down seasons both sides were almost at full strength. Brimbank were quickly into their stride as Aden Alicevic opened their account early on. It was Alicevic again for the Bruisers who added his second and his team's second, with Fitzroy struggling for goals they needed their young guns to stand up but sadly for them in was Emir Ameti who got his name on the scoresheet. Chris Yang pulled one back and gave his side a sniff but any hope they had was quickly put to bed by the man of the moment Aden Alicevic completing his hat-trick and sending Brimbank into 9th place as the loss saw Fitzroy slump into 8th place and in danger of slipping even lower.

CF Brunswick 4-6 FC Balwyn
The final clash of the night saw struggling Brunswick outfit take on a high flying Balwyn.

It was Balwyn's captain Tony Imeri who

opened the scoring for Balwyn. A swift counter attack saw Robert Zadwany set up Ivan Zilic for his first of the night. Zilic was tearing Brunswick apart with a smart finish for his second of the match. Haider Noor responded soon after with his first of the night to keep the bloods in it and Ruz Roslan pulled back another for the reds to have them within one of their opposition. It was Balwyn's superstar Zilic that killed off the game scoring twice more. Matt Italiano gave the bloods some hope getting his first of the night. It was a night for Ivan Zilic though as he set up his captain Imeri for his second of the match. Antonis Apostolakis got a late conciliation for Brunswick and Tony Saric missed a late 5th foul penalty but it made little difference. The win saw Balwyn move into 6th win a game in hand while for Brunswick they slipped even lower into the relegation zone into 10th and still struggling for form 15 rounds into the NIKE V-League premiership season.

V-League Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1 North Melbourne FC	15	14	0	1	95	38	57	42
2 Pascoe Vale FC	15	13	2	0	108	41	67	41
3 FC Prahran	15	10	2	3	95	54	41	32
4 Metropolitan FC	15	7	2	6	117	87	30	23
5 FC Essendon	15	7	1	7	85	93	-8	22
6 FC Balwyn	14	7	0	7	68	66	2	21
7 Ashburton FC	15	6	2	7	85	85	0	20
8 Fitzroy FC	15	6	1	8	61	79	-18	19
9 Brimbank FC	15	4	2	9	60	74	-14	14
10 CF Brunswick	15	4	1	10	64	88	-24	13
11 Mickleham FC	15	3	1	11	62	125	-63	10
12 FC Richmond	14	0	2	12	50	120	-70	2

Round 15 RESULTS

Wed 29th Feb

- 6:30 Metropolitan FC v FC Richmond
- 7:15 Pascoe Vale FC v Ashburton FC
- 8:00 North Melbourne FC v FC Prahran
- 8:45 Mickleham FC v FC Essendon
- 9:30 Brimbank FC v Fitzroy FC
- 10:15 CF Brunswick v FC Balwyn

Round 16 CLASHES

Wed 7th March

- 6:30 Fitzroy FC v Ashburton FC
- 7:15 Brimbank FC v FC Prahran
- 8:00 Pascoe Vale FC v FC Balwyn
- 8:45 CF Brunswick v Metropolitan FC
- 9:30 North Melbourne FC v FC Essendon
- 10:15 Mickleham FC v FC Richmond

Top Goal Scorers

- Joa Da Silva
- Maxi Avram
- Alja Redzepovic
- Sofiane Soufi

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Compiled By Alvaro Rodriguez

WHAT'S HOT

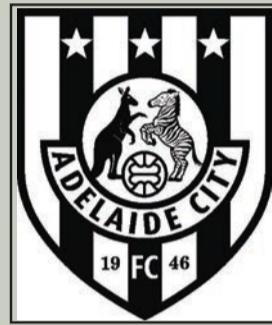
The Socceroos returned home for the WC qualifying clash at AAMI Park against Saudi Arabia midweek - regardless of the result, it'll have been good to see our national team playing here at a venue built for football in I'm sure a healthy atmosphere. Kudos to Holger also for balancing experienced heads with youth and overlooked-nearly men at international level such as Brosque and Carle, club-level performers who have largely been overlooked by the NT. All in all it makes for a good hit-out with intense competition for places, so even for a match already written off by some as a 'dead rubber', there won't be shortages of points to prove for the individual boys in green and gold. Go Aussies!



Holger gets the balance right once again.

WHAT'S NOT

For the first time since 1984 there'll be no Australian representation in the Olympic Games' football, with the Olyroos' qualification dreams dashed by the UAE in the past week; on top of all that the GCU/Clive Palmer soap-opera has reached a not-wholly-unforeseen finale with the embattled club having its license revoked on Wednesday(at time of writing) - this after the farcical 'Freedom of Speech' signage used on the GCU jerseys and stadium billboards in their weekend clash vs. the Victory. A shame given the talented youngsters emerging from the fallen club's ranks, as well as general on-field improvement under new coach Mike Mulvey. That's now two Queensland franchises gone outski in the last two seasons...hint hint maybe FFA? Now word filters out re. Frank Lowy's push to rush in a replacement next season - if this is true, in all seriousness why not forget about QLD and Western Sydney(for now at least) and instead promote either Adelaide City or Brisbane Strikers from their respective State League into the A-League, so as to create the comp's second intra-city rivalry? The two aforementioned ex-NSL powers have ready-made crosstown rivals in United and the Roar respectively, and I'm quite sure a derby in either Adelaide or Brisbane would by all rights generate public interest, so what's anyone got to lose here? Really, it can only be a bigger hit than GCU ever was!



Adelaide City for the A-League?

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SOCER TIME KIDS CATERS TO A NEW AGE IN FOOTBALL

By Michael Yelandjian

Approaching their 5th year anniversary Soccer Time Kids has had over 10,000 students participate in their 40+ clinics across Melbourne.

Established in 2007 by Bill Angeloglou this proud Australian owned and developed organisation revolutionizing early child development using soccer as its main medium.

The Soccer Time Kids programs are designed to encourage physical activity by exposing preschoolers to the basics in balance, co-ordination and movement. Throughout the classes are elements of rhyme, literacy, colours, shapes and number identification. Classes are specifically designed and run by experienced and highly trained coaches to encourage social development together with parents in a fun and safe environment.

"As a teacher...I believe the program is very well organised and run; very well structured".

What sets Soccer Time Kids apart from the rest is the method by which the coaches, not only coach soccer skills, but also teach. As an educational sports preschool program we have teamed up with leading experts in research coaching approaches, early years learning and development outcomes as well as cognitive development methods that are specific to preschool aged children. Here's



Victory's Grant Brebner endorses the Soccer Time Kids program.



Soccer Time Kids provides a great environment to learn skills



families. They do this by providing deals and services that will benefit the kids and their families. Members and followers of Soccer Time Kids receive specials and discounts through various affiliations and sponsorship held with The Athlete's Foot stores across Melbourne, Football Galaxy soccer superstore and Forza Italia merchandise store. Reusch, one of the largest manufacturers of sporting attire are also on board to provide quality clothing and merchandise for students enrolled.

The team at Soccer Time Kids is a passionate group and knows the importance of early childhood development and life memories for all involved.

For any enquiries contact 1300 47223 or visit www.soccertimekids.com.au. Alternatively Like Us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SoccerTimeKids

what some of the parents have had to say about Soccer Time Kids "As a teacher... I believe the program is very well organised and run, very well structured" Kath - Ringwood and "I am really surprised how much the kids learn at their age. Your program provides the fundamental ball and social skills" Stefan - Aspendale Garden.

Ultimately the program should provide at an early age, a positive image for education and sports as well as health and well being for the youth of our future. Whether or not our students go on to become the next Harry Kewell or David Beckham, the program will undoubtedly provide the best start in life skills and long term benefits.

"I am really surprised how much the kids learn at their age. Your program provides the fundamental ball and

social skills".

Franchising is new to Soccer Time Kids but due to the rapid ongoing growth and high demand it only seemed right to begin a new journey forward.

To date, Soccer Time Kids has granted 3 franchises; Berwick, Cranbourne, Frankston and their surrounding suburbs which are now owned and operated by two couples, Jackie and Nigel Chaplin with friends Chris and Frauke Lever. The new franchisees were parents that had their children enrolled in one of the Soccer Time Kids programs and when they heard about the potential in owning a Soccer Time Kids franchise they quickly took up the opportunity and they haven't looked back.

The two couples purchased 3 territories that included existing loca-

tions (Berwick, Frankston North and Cranbourne), these venues already held quite a large client base and revenue. This wasn't enough to satisfy their enthusiasm so they proceeded to open up a further 3 locations to start their first term with Frankston South, Mornington and Pakenham - all 3 of which are running successfully. In Term 2 they plan to open up a further 4 new locations some of which will be running on multiple days along with their existing locations which also plan to run on multiple days.

"Having 2 little 'Soccer Time Kids' ourselves, the decision to get involved & buy a franchise was easy. We already knew what a great program it was & being able to work from home, balancing motherhood & work

has been great. The team are fantastic to work with & I know are only a phone call away." Jackie told Soccer Time Kids.

The Soccer Time Kids program has had a great impact on various community groups and organisations across Melbourne. The Company always make sure they give back through fund raising and charity events, from donating soccer balls to HeartKids Australia, running fun days for the Cancer Kids Foundation, having raffle drives with all proceeds going to the MS Society and many more. Sponsorship is also provided to less fortunate families every term. Its

doesn't end there, the Soccer Time Kids team is always on the lookout for new and exciting ways to provide a service of the highest standard to their current, future and existing

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Peñarol without coach; Ronaldinho for Olympics

Latin Wrap



Francis Fields

Peñarol, one of South America's best-known clubs, have fired coach Gregorio Pérez after six months, ending his fifth stint in charge of their side with a phone call.

"Peñarol's board of directors has resolved that Gregorio Pérez will not continue as coach of the yellow-and-black's senior squad," said the Montevideo club on its website.

The Observer newspaper said that Pérez, whose previous spell in charge ended with a text message, learned his fate this time over the phone. Pérez took over in September following the resignation of Diego Aguirre, who led and inspired the team to the final of last season's Copa Libertadores losing to Santos.

Aguirre had resurrected the fanatically-supported club that had gone into a long decline since their last triumph in 1987.

The 64-year-old Pérez won Uruguayan titles in each of his previous four stints. Peñarol had lost all three games since the mid-season break without scoring a goal before its win over El Tanque Sisley earlier in the week, 2-0.

Despite the backing of club president Edgar Welker and the vocal support from fans, the decision was met with both dignity and indignation.

The 4-0 win over Colombian side Atlético Nacional in the Copa Libertadores was too much of a high bar in standards to replicate. Peñarol's performance had not been repeated since then.

Despite support from club president Edgar Welker as well as the fans, it would not be enough. The coach was advised of his dismissal by Gervasio Gedanke as well as Fernando Morena directly at his house.

The side will be coached by Tito González as they look for a replacement. The top name on their list is Banfield coach Jorge Da Silva, he has denied any approach or deal. Other candidates on Peñarol's agenda are Pablo Repetto as well as Nelson Acosta.

Acosta, Uruguayan-born and based in Chile has opted to remain at club side Cobreloa and he too has dismissed claims of any approach by the club.

Gregorio Pérez is one of the most successful coaches in club history as he was a vital part of the club in the 90's. In his previous stint, he was in charge of a Peñarol that toured Australia with two friendly wins against former National League Soccer sides Wollongong Wolves and Marconi Stallions.

Newspapers in Uruguay have been quick to report the manner in which Pérez has exited the club. Having won four league titles with El Carbonero during his first two stints, He was also Oscar Washington Tabárez' assistant with the Uruguayan national team during the 1990 World Cup in Italy.

On the pitch, goalkeeper Fabián Carini is close to renewing according to Ovación newspaper. Only minor details regarding his contract should have him with the club for another year.

Winger Fabián Estoyanoff also confirmed he shall remain with the club for season 2012. Peñarol play catch up in the Uruguayan Clausura against Bella Vista (Thursday afternoon AEST) in week two of the current season with 3 points and in sixth spot in the table.

Ronaldinho keen for Olympics

Ronaldinho expressed his desire to fight for Brazil's one and only international football prize missing, the



Gregorio Pérez "feeling no hatred" as he got his marching orders from club giant Peñarol



Jefferson Montero of Ecuador feigns Wilmer Crisanto on Honduras at the George Capwell stadium in Guayaquil in one of this week's numerous international friendlies

Olympic Games.

This year's 2012 Games in London might feature the tricky midfielder along with AC Milan defender Thiago Silva, Ronaldinho was one of the two over 23-year-olds called up to Dunga's Brazilian squad at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

The former Barcelona player maker found the back of the net once in Beijing, scoring a penalty in Brazil's 4-0 win against New Zealand.

"It's a great competition. Of course we are motivated to get there. I'll do my part to make sure I play in the competition again," Ronaldinho told Globoesporte.

Teixeira remains as boss in Brazil

The president of the Rio de Janeiro Football Federation, Rubens Lopes confirmed that Ricardo Teixeira will continue his position as the president of the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF).

Speaking after the conference which was attended by representatives of all 27 state federations in Brazil on Wednesday, Lopes revealed that Teixeira received 'unanimous' support to continue his role as the head of the governing body.

Teixeira, who is also the president of Brazil's 2014 World Cup Local Organising Committee and a member of FIFA's Executive Committee, will be the leader of the CBF until 2015.

Menezes disappointed with Brazil performance

Brazil coach Mano Menezes announced his disappointment with the performances of Ronaldinho and David Luiz in Brazil's rusty 2-1 victory over Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It was Saša Panačić's 91th minute own goal that handed Brazil the win at the AFG Arena - in a game that saw the Seleção struggle to create many opportunities.

However speaking to Globoesporte after the game, Menezes was particularly displeased with Ronaldinho's role in the match - whom he replaced for Ganso, just after the hour mark. He said:

"I believe Ronaldinho was below what Ronaldinho is. He wasn't able to provide the passing quality which he usually gives."

Another Brazilian player's performance that was particularly below par was defender David Luiz - who's misplaced pass led to Bosnia's goal. However Menezes revealed that he had given the Chelsea player some words of comfort after the game.

"David Luiz had a performance be-

low his usual performances. We had a conversation after the game and I told him that errors are part of a footballer's life. You can't let that interfere with your entire game. As a defender, you can't linger in that area of the pitch and let your opponent come away with the ball."

Thiago Silva felt Brazil struggled as well, the Brazilian captain told ESPN Brasil:

"Their quality in the tactical sense is impeccable. All the players ran in line with the ball and it was very difficult to find space.

"When you play against a team like that, the risk actually increases. They like to play on the counterattack and make your game really difficult."

La Celeste concede late goal

A second-half goal by striker Bogdan Stancu earned home side Romania, a 1-1 draw with Uruguay in a friendly international at the National Arena in Bucharest on Wednesday.

Stancu equalised with a powerful header from Gabriel Torje's precise cross early in the second half after Edinson Cavani had fired the visitors ahead just two minutes into the game. The South Americans started strongly and the Napoli sharpshooter beat Romania keeper Ciprian Tatarusanu, curling a delicate left-footed shot from just outside the area from a clever Gastón Ramírez pass.

Cavani missed a golden chance to double Uruguay's lead less than a quarter of an hour later when he hit the post from close range from Luis Suárez's left-wing cross. The hosts, who failed to reach Euro 2012, pinned the Sky Blues back midway through the first half and Marius Niculae sent a powerful shot against the crossbar.

Uruguay had a strong penalty claim turned down by Hungarian referee Viktor Kassai when Tatarusanu appeared to bring down Cavani in the area seven minutes before the break.

There was controversy before the match with the Romanian Football Federation making an official complaint last week after being offered money to appoint another referee in place.

The Uruguayans are scheduled to meet Russia in Moscow in another friendly fixture at the Luzhniki stadium on May 25th.

Campbell gives Costa Rica win over Wales

The Welsh national side failed to score in their first match since the unfortunate death of manager Gary Speed losing 1-0 to Costa Rica in an international friendly at the Cardiff City Stadium on Wednesday.

"David Luiz had a performance be-

Arsenal youngster Joel Campbell scored the only goal for the Central Americans, warming-up for CONCACAF competition. It was no ordinary friendly for Wales or even a warm-up for the 2014 World Cup qualifiers.

Instead it was a highly emotional fixture for Wales, their first since the death of popular and respected former midfielder Speed, found hanged at his home in November.

New Wales manager Chris Coleman admitted he and his players had found it hard to cope with the special atmosphere of the match. It was a strange atmosphere because we were still grieving, but at the same time we had a game to win".

Amid the tributes for Speed before kick-off, arguably the most moving was when fans held up cards that spelt out 'GARY' in the middle of a Welsh flag after his sons had run out with Craig Bellamy, a friend of the former manager, who was captaining his country in the absence through injury of Aaron Ramsey.

But it wasn't long before a Costa Rica team, who last year drew with Argentina and world champions Spain, had taken a seventh minute lead against a Wales side without Tottenham winger Gareth Bale.

Fulham's Bryan Ruiz produced a superb defence splitting pass that found the run of Campbell, currently on loan at French Ligue 1 side Lorient, slotted the ball into the bottom corner to stun Wales. Campbell nearly had a second when he forced a sharp save from goalkeeper Lewis Price.

Costa Rica gave Wales something of a football lesson lesson for most of the first half with their pace and movement but the Welsh finished the opening period strongly, with the visitors looking vulnerable at corners.

The Ticos had the chance to extend their lead through Kenny Cunningham, hitting the post with a thumping drive. It was an important win for Costa Rica as they prepare for their World Cup qualifying on the 8th of June against El Salvador at home in San José. Its next friendly is lined up on the 21st later this month against Jamaica, followed by Honduras and Guatemala in April and May respectively.

Fernández equalises for Chile against Ghana

Despite playing the last 20 minutes a man down, Chile rallied to a 1-1 tie with Ghana at a rain-soaked but festive PPL Park in Philadelphia.

In Matías Fernández equalized for Chile from the penalty spot in the 75th minute, canceling out a 42nd-minute

goal for Ghana by Richard Mpóng.

Mpong's strike was beautifully set up by a low cross from Sulley Muntari. The AC Milan star swerved a pass through the box to an open Mpóng, who calmly slotted the ball past Chilean goalkeeper Claudio Bravo.

A half-time incident occurred when the Chilean side, led by Claudio Borghi walked onto the pitch and were left waiting for the Ghanaians to arrive. Chile decided to applaud the fans present and walked off, only to be instructed by the match referee that the second half was to go ahead.

For a while, it looked like an under-strength Ghana squad would pull off the upset of one of South America's most dynamic teams. But their hopes were dashed when Chile's Barcelona star forward Alexis Sánchez was brought down in the box after retrieving a rebound of a blocked Fernández shot.

The game was quite chippy, but it was also quite open. Both teams created good chances in both halves.

Ayovi scores a brace over Honduras

Honduras loss 2-0 against Ecuador in this week's international friendly. Midfielder Roger Espinoza earned his 22nd cap as the Kansas City Wizard played starred for his country despite the result.

Teammate and fellow Honduras central midfielder Wilson Palacios are regarded as the two best players in the squad. La Bicolor is continuing to prepare for their 2014 World Cup Qualifiers which is less than four months away.

Ecuador coach Reinaldo Rueda was pleased with his side's performance as Ecuador's Walter Ayovi scored a brace. The Pachuca forward in the Mexican Clausura netted in as Honduras barely passed its opposition's half.

Barely 14 minutes old, the opening goal exposed Honduras' weak defence as the South Africa World Cup 2010 side were seen sluggish against a dynamic Ecuadorian side.

The second goal on 69 minutes put the icing on the cake as Ayovi assured Ecuador the win. For Honduras, its forwards are performing below par as Jerry Bengtson and Anthony Lozano did little damage and neither did substitute Rommel Quioto.

Ecuador Coach Reinaldo Rueda admitted, "Honduras is a respected opponent and it required a lot of work for us to defeat them".

Honduras meets Panama in World Cup qualifying in June in CONCACAF's Group C alongside Canada and

Cuba.

Peru boss happy with Tunisia friendly

The 1-1 away draw against Tunisia for the Peruvian national side was dubbed "productive" by coach Sergio Markarián.

In a post-match press conference, the Uruguayan-born admitted the match served to correct many tactical weaknesses in the starting line-up looking ahead to the World Cup qualifying round that restarts in June later this year.

Claudio Pizarro netted in from the penalty spot just before half-time and cancelling out the opener only seconds later scored by Wissem Ben Yahia for the home side.

"We played a vivid match, both technically and physically. It was interesting. What we did here (in Tunis) will be useful for our match against Colombia", according to Markarián.

Nicknamed 'the Magician', highlighted his team was always in search of a goal and never speculated at the back.

"We (Peru) didn't lose our phisomony despite the substitutions", as the national boss put it in analytical terms. He also added praise to the Tunisian side. "Tunisia has confirmed its solid positions in the game, as one of Africa's strongest opposition".

Pekerman's Colombia defeat Mexico

Radamel Falcao and Juan Cuadrado scored as Colombia defeated Mexico 2-0 in new Colombia coach Jose Pekerman's debut Wednesday night.

The exhibition attracted 51,615 fans, the second largest crowd for a soccer match at the Sun Life Stadium in Miami.

Falcao gave Colombia a 1-0 lead in the 37th minute. Mexico goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa deflected but failed to clear Dorlan Pabón's shot from the right wing. Falcao retrieved the loose ball and tapped in a shot from inside the 6-yard box.

Cuadrado's goal in the 59th minute put Mexico in a deeper hole. James Rodríguez sent a pass to Pablo Armero toward the left wing. Armero dribbled toward the penalty area and sent a centering pass to Cuadrado near the far post, where he converted on from 10 metres.

Pekerman, a former Argentina national team coach, took over Colombia's squad in January, replacing Leonel Alvarez.

Season worsens for McLeish and Villa

LONDON CALLING



With Sam Collins in the UK

You couldn't have accused them of lacking clarity. Their feelings were concise - no one wanted him. Anyone but 'Big Eck'. Aston Villa owner Randy Learner didn't bat an eyelid - Alex McLeish was appointed, despite everything.

Despite the 500 fans that protested vigorously outside Villa Park the day preceding his arrival. Despite the messages and banners seen everywhere along Trinity Road - one of which read 'Bluenose scum not welcome'. Despite the dozens of Villans interviewed on national TV, threatening to hand their season ticket back in. It was all extraneous in the end.

McLeish's tenure as Birmingham City boss - Villa's fiercest rivals - three miles up the road, meant it was always unlikely to work out for him at Aston Villa. A good start to the campaign was imperative, and, in fairness, the former Rangers coach achieved that. Unbeaten in their first seven league games - the first time the club had accomplished that since 2006 - it should have been an admirable beginning to life at Villa for McLeish, except, it

wasn't. And whilst undefeated up until the first day of October, they only had two wins in the opening three months of the season. And, predictably, the football wasn't aesthetically pleasing. It still isn't. Defensive, unadventurous, uninspiring - only four teams have scored less, one of those are bottom side Wigan Athletic. They have failed to score in 10 of their 26 league games. In fact, in McLeish's last 102 league games as a coach, his sides have managed a mere 104 goals. Since leading Birmingham to league cup success in February last year, the Glaswegian has been in charge of 38 Premier League games (the equivalent of a full season) - his record is W8 D14 L16, 38 points - relegation form. And he would know a thing or two about dropping into the second division, just ask fans at the St Andrews Stadium.

McLeish needs to reach the clichéd 40-point safety mark hastily. Villa are just eight points above the bottom three, and their draw at Wigan on Saturday was evidence of The Claret and Blue's impetuous decline. Roberto Martinez, Wigan's Spanish coach, insisted Villa would be "fine", but reminded the club, whom he rejected last summer, that this league is "ruthless". Three consecutive top-6 finishes under Martin O'Neil, who left the club in acrimonious circumstances two years back, had everyone else in the division worried. On the fringes



Alex McLeish continues to stir emotions in Birmingham, even after moving across the city.

of Champions League qualification, an imperious home record and wins away at the likes of the Emirates and Old Trafford, Villa were a threat. Gerard Houllier's reign in charge last season was arduous, but at least he didn't come from down the road. It's no longer Europa League trips, but survival, that concerns the 1982 European champions. And this weekend, that unenviable task got even harder. Top-scorer Darren Bent (10 goals) was ruled out for the season with an ankle injury, whilst his striking partner,

Robbie Keane, returned to LA Galaxy after his impressive loan spell ended. Last summer's £9.5m signing, Charles N'Zogbia, is exasperated by events in the Midlands this season. "For the first time in my life," the French winger said, "I'm not happy playing football." Such personnel problems have left McLeish in an unforgiving predicament.

Villa's home record should have been McLeish's saviour. The 53-year old managed a formidable 53 weeks (September 2009 - October 2010)

unbeaten in his own back yard whilst at Birmingham - momentous, even if the football was bland. But Villa Park is no longer a fortress. No victories there since bonfire night, and just 13 goals in 14 league games. Even the manager has admitted their form on their own patch is "pretty abysmal". Villa's season ticket holders will feel perturbed - those who actually purchased them, that is. "A lot of fans will hand season tickets back in," one fan told BBC news before McLeish's arrival, "or not even buy one now." To

worsen proceedings, Aston Villa this week announced record losses of £54m - a figure increased mainly due to the £12m Learner has forked out on managerial changes in the last ten months (including delayed compensation paid to O'Neil).

Learner isn't the most vocal of owners, but reports suggest McLeish's position is safe. Sacking the former Aberdeen defender would be futile now, anyway. It's this manager, and these group of players for the remaining 12 games. It is "one of those seasons you need to get out of the way" as Gabriel Agbonlahor, the Villa forward, declared on the weekend, but the club must ensure the season doesn't go from inadequate to abominable. And McLeish must ensure he doesn't follow Avram Grant in successive relegations from the Premier League (The Israeli sunk with Portsmouth then West Ham United).

Fixtures against Manchester United, Arsenal and Liverpool - all away - still loom for Villa. They did manage a 3-1 win at Chelsea in December, and their next three immediate games - Blackburn, Fulham and Bolton - are all 'winnable'. But so was the game at Wigan. The 29 points Villa have attained after 26 league games, both this and last season, are the lowest tally the club has had since 1991 - they finished 17th that year. The losses of James Milner, Gareth Barry, Ashley Young and Stewart Downing - four England internationals - are chiefly responsible, but McLeish has a squad good enough to stay in the Premier League this season.

They might despise him, but the Villa fans need to support 'Big Eck' until May, at least.

Messi stars for Argentina, big win for Sweden

Lionel Messi led Argentina to a 3-1 win over Switzerland, while Sweden thumped Croatia in Zagreb in a busy day of international football.

Messi scored his first international hat-trick, while Swiss young gun Xherdan Shaqiri grabbed the home side's goal, in the match in Bern on Wednesday.

The FIFA World Player of the Year got his first in the 20th minute when he linked with Sergio Aguero who returned the ball to his captain with a neat back-heal and Messi scored.

Shaqiri tied the game four minutes into the second half but Messi claimed victory when he dribbled through the Swiss defence and chipped the ball over goalkeeper Marco Wolfli in the 88th minute.

The Barcelona star then completed his hat-trick with a penalty in injury time.

In Croatia, the match was tied at half-time after Jonas Olsson's own goal had cancelled out Zlatan Ibrahimovic's early penalty, before a second-half double from Sunderland's Sebastian Larsson wrapped up the win for Sweden against their fellow Euro 2012 qualifiers.

In another clash involving two teams that will be at the continental championships in June, Russia stunned Denmark 2-0 in Copenhagen thanks

to a goal and an assist from Andrei Arshavin.

The visitors hit the front in just the fourth minute when Arshavin set up Roman Shirokov and then doubled their lead just before half-time thanks to a powerful shot from Arshavin.

The two hosts of this year's European Championships had promising results, with Ukraine winning 3-2 away from home against Israel and Poland earning a 0-0 draw against Portugal.

Of the other Euro 2012 qualifiers in action, Greece were held 1-1 at home by Belgium, while Republic of Ireland and Czech Republic also drew 1-1 in Dublin.

It was a full day of international action around the world, with Austria defeating Finland 3-1, Slovakia overcoming Turkey 2-1, Uruguay drawing 1-1 in Romania, Cyprus holding Serbia to a 0-0 draw, Norway thumping Northern Ireland 3-0, Slovenia tying Scotland 1-1 and Costa Rica beating Wales 1-0.

Elsewhere, Jamaica beat New Zealand 3-2, Georgia won 2-1 at home over Albania, Armenia defeated Canada 3-1, Hungary versus Bulgaria finished 1-1, Latvia and Kazakhstan ended 0-0, and Moldova drew 0-0 with Belarus.



Arjen Robben scored a brilliant double, including a late winner, to resist England's late comeback in the Netherlands' 3-2 win on Wednesday at the St Jakob-Park

And in other results on Wednesday, Luxembourg beat Macedonia 2-1, Malta won 2-1 over Liechtenstein, Montenegro defeated Iceland 2-1, Peru drew 1-1 in Tunisia and South Africa was held 0-0 at home by Senegal. Arjen Robben scored a brilliant double, including a late winner, to resist England's late comeback in the Netherlands' 3-2 win on Wednesday.

Holland 3-2 England
Despite playing well within them-

selves for nearly an hour, outstanding attacking play by the Dutch in the second half exposed England's fragility in what is likely to be caretaker manager Stuart Pearce's first and only match in charge.

Trailing 2-0 after goals from Robben and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, England pulled a goal back in the 85th minute when Gary Cahill appeared from nowhere in the centre-forward's position to guide the ball calmly through the legs of the Dutch goalkeeper Maarten

Stekelenburg.

A minute into added time, Ashley Young appeared to have snatched a draw for the home side when he scored with a clever dink.

But the magnificent Robben had other ideas, taking a ball on the right side of the box a minute later and shaping a curling shot into the top corner to claim the win.

Both players crashed to the ground after the sickening aerial challenge and required lengthy treatment on the pitch, before Smalling was carefully stretchered down the tunnel and on to a waiting ambulance, while Huntelaar was immediately substituted with a suspected broken nose.

It looked as though the Netherlands would cruise to victory before England's late fight-back, but Robben's class ensured they would make amends for their last effort at Wembley - a 4-1 defeat in 1996.

Spain 5-0 Venezuela
Spain ran out comprehensive 5-0 winners over Venezuela in their international friendly in Malaga on Wednesday.

Roberto Soldado marked his first appearance for Spain since 2007 with

a clinical hat-trick, while David Silva and Andres Iniesta were also on the scoresheet as the home side dominated their less illustrious opponents.

Germany 1-2 France

France's revival under Laurent Blanc continued as they inflicted a 2-1 defeat upon Germany in their international friendly in Bremen.

Olivier Giroud scored just 21 minutes into his international debut, before Chelsea's Florent Malouda gave France a deserved second on 69 minutes.

Cacau did manage to pull one back for the hosts in the dying minutes, but it was more than Germany deserved after a disappointing performance against the revitalised French.

Italy 0-1 USA

The United States picked up their first ever victory over Italy on Wednesday, winning their international friendly 1-0 in Genoa.

Fulham's Clint Dempsey scored the lone goal of the game early in the second half, and despite a flurry of activity from the home side, the Americans held out for the win at the Stadio Luigi Ferraris.

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EPL Wrap



Steven Talevski

Gunners stage epic comeback

Arsenal staged an incredible comeback from two goals down against Tottenham to claim the three points at the Emirates Stadium as they remain in the coveted fourth spot on the table.

Goals from Bacary Sagna, Robin van Persie, Tomas Rosicky and a double from Theo Walcott sealed the victory after Tottenham were two nil up in the 34th minute courtesy from a Louis Saha strike and a Emmanuel Adebayor penalty.

Arsenal Manager Arsene Wenger claimed the comeback was "perfect". "Today shows that Arsenal is alive more than anybody thought before the game," said Wenger.

"We had a performance today where the technical side and drive of the team was perfect.

"Everything was perfect despite a very bad start. I think Tottenham started well for the first five minutes, after it was all us for 85 minutes."

"We dominated the game. We were 2-0 down and refused to lose the game. We were determined to win. We had a great spirit."

Chelsea kept the pressure on Arsenal as they remained in fifth on equal points with the club from North London after a three nil victory over relegation zone strugglers Bolton.

However it's a much different story for Tottenham who remain in third spot but move 10 points behind table toppers Manchester City after their comfortable three nil victory over Blackburn.

Manchester City remains two points above second placed Manchester United who had to rely on Ryan Giggs to slot in a 92nd minute winner for a fairy-tale ending in his 900th appearance for the Red Devils.

The 38 year old Giggs said after the game that it is special to play that many games for a club he supported as a youngster.

"To play for such a great team, a great



Match of the Day: As the race for the EPL title heats up, Man United hosts Spurs on Saturday.

club and the team I've supported and grown up with, it's obviously special to play 900 games," Giggs told MUTV.

"I'll keep going and hopefully there are more goals to come.

"You've seen that from the celebrations right in front of the fans.

"And late on. It doesn't get any better than that. It's a feeling that won't change whether you're 17 or 38 like I am now."

Meanwhile the bottom of the Premier League table remains tight with five teams within two points of each other after last weekend's fixtures.

Despite picking up a nil all draw at home to Aston Villa, Wigan remain on bottom on goal difference with Bolton second from bottom.

Blackburn remain as the third team in the relegation zone but are within goal difference from escaping the dreaded bottom three with Queens Park Rangers only above the bottom three on goal difference after their one nil loss to Fulham.

Wolverhampton moved one point away from relegation after their come from behind draw against Newcastle United in caretaker Terry Connor's first game in the role.

In other Premier League results this weekend, West Bromwich Albion shocked Sunderland four nil at the Hawthorns while Stoke defeated Swansea two nil at home.

Everton were the only Premier League Club without any action this weekend

as their game against Merseyside rivals Liverpool was postponed due to Liverpool's participation in the Carling Cup Final which they came out victorious on penalties against Championship side Cardiff City.

EPL PREVIEW

The Premier League title race is set to create another turn this weekend as second placed Manchester United travel to White Hart Lane to face third placed Tottenham.

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson believes that the trip to White Hart Lane will be a massive game on their way to a potential 20th League title.

"It's going to be a massive game [at Spurs]," Ferguson told Inside United magazine.

"If we can survive that one, then we'll have a big, big chance of winning the league.

"Yes, I would take it [being two points behind City going into the game at the Etihad Stadium]. I would rather go there on level points.

"But if we could go there within striking distance of being top of the league, I'd take it."

Meanwhile Tottenham midfielder Rafael van der Vaart believes his side can comeback from their disappointing loss to Arsenal but claims their title hunt may well be over.

"It won't be difficult to lift ourselves," he told the Evening Standard.

"Do we have the mental strength to put this behind us? Of course. It will be difficult against United but the confidence is there.

"Of course you always hope [for a chance at the title] but Manchester City are winning their games so easily, especially now we have lost, so maybe the title is over."

"Third is our main goal now and I'm really confident we can finish there."

With Manchester United seeming to have a difficult task this weekend, it is a much different story for Manchester City who seem to have a comfortable match at home against relegation zone挣扎者 Bolton.

Roberto Mancini may soon have a major selection headache with Carlos Tevez turning out for a 45 minute run in the side's reserve squad mid-week but is unlikely to be selected this weekend.

This weekend's other major clash will see Carling Cup champions Liverpool host fourth placed Arsenal at Anfield.

With Liverpool now already qualified for the Europa League, due to their Cup triumph, their focus is now clearly on getting to fourth place on the League to achieve a Champions League position. However this will remain as a difficult task with the club in seventh position, seven points below fourth placed Arsenal.

AFC World Cup qualifying wrap: Saudis exit, Oman through

Oman progressed to the fourth round of AFC World Cup qualifying with a win over Thailand, while Australia edged Saudi Arabia on Wednesday.

Saudi Arabia were leading Australia midway through the second half in Melbourne as they looked certain to clinch second spot in Group D.

But three goals in three second-half minutes saw Australia surge to a memorable 4-2 win at AAMI Park, sending them into the final stage of World Cup qualification on a massive high.

Australia looked set for their first defeat on home soil in almost three years when Saudi Arabia led 2-1 with just 17 minutes left.

But just as the visitors were dreaming of keeping their hopes of qualification for Brazil alive, Harry Kewell, Alex Brosque and Brett Emerton each scored to secure the points in emphatic fashion.

Brosque finished with a brace after initially cancelling out Salem Al Dawsari's 19th-minute strike just before the break, only to see Nasser Al-Shamrani restore Saudi Arabia's advantage moments later.

It meant Oman advanced after securing a hard-fought 2-0 win over Thailand at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Oman.

Hussain Al-Hadhi gave Paul Le Guen's team a 10th-minute lead, before Oman sealed the win through Abdullah Al Muqbal's powerful left-foot effort in stoppage time.

In a dramatic finish to Group E, Bahrain missed out on qualification despite a thumping 10-0 win over Indonesia.

With Qatar trailing against Iran, Peter Taylor's men needed eight goals to

progress - and had that tally after 71 minutes.

But a late header from Mohammed Kasola in Tehran saw Qatar secure a 2-2 draw against group leaders Iran, sending them through to the next stage of qualifying.

In Riffa, Indonesia's Syamsidar was red-carded after five minutes, with Bahrain's Mohammed Al Alawi and Sayed Dhiya netting hat-tricks in the win, during which their side also missed two penalties.

South Korea took top spot in a tight Group B after goals from Lee Dong-Gook and Lee Keun-Ho helped them to a tough 2-0 win over Kuwait in Seoul.

Kuwait needed a win to advance, but their loss left Lebanon to progress despite a 4-2 loss to the United Arab Emirates, who registered their first points with the win.

In Group A, a brace from Hao Junmin led China to a 3-1 win over Jordan.

Jordan were already assured a place in the next round of qualifying before their loss in Guangzhou, while Iraq sealed top spot as Younis Mahmoud's hat-trick guided them to a resounding 7-1 victory over Singapore.

Elsewhere, Tajikistan secured their first point in Group C after a 1-1 draw at home to North Korea.

Akhtam Khamroqulov and Jang Song-Hyok exchanged goals as the bottom two sides finished their qualifying campaigns, before Uzbekistan beat Japan 1-0 to consolidate top spot in the group.

Japan were still comfortable Group C runners-up, and will progress to the next stage.



England selection provides excitement but still has fundamental flaws

London Eye



Eddie Gray

Thursday the 23rd of February marked a new dawn for the future of English football.

With Stuart Pearce in temporary charge, the former England player had to pick a squad that provided the nation with enthusiasm and also showed clear signs of building towards the future.

Manchester United pair Phil Jones and Chris Smalling were handed call ups along with Micah Richards being recalled to the international fold after being frozen out under previous manager Fabio Capello.

Tom Cleverley was also included with Daniel Sturridge and Danny Welbeck also given the opportunity to display their talents on arguably the biggest stage in world football.

However, the biggest surprise came with the inclusion of Sunderland front man Frazier Campbell. The striker began his comeback from two horrific knee injuries this year and ever since his return to the Black Cats first team he has been nothing short of exceptional.

Campbell, who left Manchester Unit-



Psycho Lions: Stuart Pearce takes temporary charge of the English national team.

ed to join Sunderland back in 2009, has always been highly regarded and is now looking to push on his career and put his devastating knee injuries behind him.

Despite some exciting inclusions there were also some debateable selections too.

Wingers Theo Walcott and Stewart Downing prior to the Thursday announcement had been in poor form for their clubs with the latter being consigned to the substitute's bench in recent weeks. Downing's explanation for having a bad run of form is understandable. Stepping up to play for

Liverpool from Aston Villa was always going to be difficult and the wide man has found the transition difficult.

Walcott's loss of form on the other hand is harder to explain. The Arsenal man has always had periods of excellence and then disappointment but his recent run has left fans hugely frustrated.

These two players in particular raised the question once again as to whether reputation is a greater influencer than form in the selection process, especially with Swansea wingers Nathan Dyer and Scott Sinclair playing so well currently.

Adding further fuel to this issue is the failure to mention Norwich's Grant Holt in the selection process. With Frazier Campbell picked on form then why was Holt not even considered? After all the Canaries front man has more goals in the Premier League this season than any other Englishman bar Wayne Rooney.

Despite recent form problems and justification over selection proving difficult Walcott and Downing performed magnificently in their sides weekend fixtures. Walcott bagged a brace and Downing claimed the man of the match award in the Carling Cup final,

perhaps justifying their selection. But if one off displays of brilliance makes us forget about a season of indifference then this may be a critical reason as to why England have failed to challenge on a world wide stage at all in the last decade.

Other questionable decisions over squad selection have surfaced with some in form players not included. Manchester City centre back Joleon Lescott, who was not selected in the initial squad, can feel the most hard done by having played exceptionally well this campaign in what has been a superb defensive line for the table toppers.

Additionally to this the former Everton man was one half of the centre back pairing that kept a clean sheet against European champions Spain, arguably the best attacking side on the planet, in England's most recent friendly.

A further reason which makes Lescott's omission slightly stranger, before being called up as an injury replacement, are the performances of Chelsea and Manchester United in their last European outings against Napoli and Ajax respectively.

Both sides fielded inexperienced centre half pairings which were both exposed by the attacking threats of their opposition. What is more alarming is three of the four defenders (Gary Cahill, Chris Smalling and Phil Jones) who played in those games at the heart of their sides defence are

included in the squad with no experience alongside.

Previous stalwarts Rio Ferdinand and Frank Lampard have been dropped from the squad with Pearce looking at younger options for the time being.

However with both showing signs of decline in their performances this season and both no longer commanding first team spots at their clubs questions have arose as to whether this is the end of their international careers.

In Lampard's case he has fallen victim of a new regime at Chelsea where manager Andre Villas Boas is trying to revamp an ageing squad. Ferdinand, who has suffered persistent back injuries recently, has lost the killer pace he once had which has seen him become suspect against quick opponents.

So with the potential end of an era coming sooner than expected for a few senior pros it has opened the door for a new breed to come through.

It is refreshing to see youth backed to perform on the world stage, following the idea that if you are good enough it doesn't matter how old you are but for England to truly flourish then who you play your club football for shouldn't matter if you are the in-form man.



Luca Cetta

Controversy reigns supreme

The top of the table Milan v Juventus clash was fraught with controversial episodes amid a 1-1 draw. Elsewhere, Lazio got back on track after a tumultuous week, but city rivals Roma crashed at Atalanta. Inter lost yet again, this time at Napoli.

Milan and Juventus were separated by just a point heading into their showdown at the Stadio Giuseppe Meazza. While the visitors were at full strength, Milan were missing a host of players, including Alessandro Nesta and Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

The Rossoneri were off to a flyer when Leonardo Bonucci cheaply gave the ball away and Antonio Nocerino drove in a shot from distance – a taking a deflection off Bonucci – to beat Gianluigi Buffon.

The incident still being debated came after 25 minutes, when Sulley Muntari headed the ball over the line from close range and despite linesman Roberto Romagnoli appearing to be in perfect position, he deemed there to be no goal. Television footage suggests the ball was in by at least half a meter, while referee Paolo Tagliaferri appeared to be signalling towards the centre circle. However, he chose the advice of his assistant and it was play on.

Juventus also had a goal disallowed, as Romagnoli flagged Alessandro Matri offside when replays suggest the player held his line. Yet Juve did find their equaliser in the 82nd minute as Matri stole in ahead of Thiago Silva to poke Simone Pepe's cross beyond Christian Abbiati. Arturo Vidal was then sent off for a pro-



Pressure is once again mounting on Claudio Ranieri's Inter Milan.

fessional foul as the sides could not be separated.

Milan were bitterly disappointed at half time as they held the ascendancy but not a two goal advantage. Vice-president Adriano Galliani stormed into the tunnel and while there got into a heated argument with Juve boss Antonio Conte. Galliani told Conte "Look what happens when you spend the whole week crying" in retaliation to Juve's penalty claims, to which Conte responded: "What a pulpit, you lot are the mafia of football." Milan Coach Massimiliano Allegri said the result was falsified, while Conte praised Milan for controlling the match but was involved in another heated argument with Sky analyst and ex-Milan star Zvonimir Boban after the Croat said both disallowed goals were not equal in stature, a claim Conte refuted.

Video evidence was also required to sort out of the ball incidents. Philippe Mexes has been banned for three matches after punching Marco Borriello in the ribs, while Sulley Muntari and Andrea Pirlo escaped sanction for their respective incidents. Muntari was seen swinging at Stephan Lichtsteiner three times in quick succession while Pirlo was attempting to shield the ball

from Mark van Bommel and appeared to swing his elbow towards the Dutchman. Milan even released a statement on their website making note of this incident, which upset long-time servant Pirlo. Finally, at the final whistle, Giorgio Chiellini and Massimo Ambrosini were involved in a scuffle which was only broken up after additional personnel from both sides became involved. All in all, the poisonous draw maintains the status quo.

Elsewhere, Claudio Ranieri says he will not resign, as pressure increases following a 1-0 loss at Napoli. Ezequiel Lavezzi netted the only goal of the match to ensure Inter lost their fourth successive match – a run in which they have not scored a goal.

Daniele De Rossi was left out of the Roma team facing Atalanta because he turned up to a team meeting reportedly five minutes late. He could only watch on as Atalanta carved Roma open time after time on the counter in a 4-1 drubbing. To compound matters, Marco Cassetti and Pablo Osvaldo were sent off and Fernando Gago reached the yellow card limit, meaning all three will miss the Derby versus Lazio this week.

Edy Reja says he will now remain at Lazio just days after tending his resig-

nation. This was following the 1-0 win over Fiorentina – a much needed victory – which was secured thanks to Miroslav Klose. Udinese are still level on points in third following a 3-1 win at Bologna.

Palermo are another side with reason to feel aggrieved at refereeing decisions during their 4-1 loss at Siena. Federico Balzaretti was sent off in just the second minute for a last-man challenge, despite the fact Fabrizio Miccoli was chasing back and likely to reach the ball. Palermo actually took the lead but Siena equalised via a non-existent penalty and the floodgates then opened.

Elsewhere, Genoa came back from two goals down to equalise deep into stoppage time against Parma, as Lecce continued their run of form with a 2-1 win away at Cagliari. Novara and Cesena are in deep trouble after losing at Catania and Chievo respectively.

Luis Enrique will look to put the Atalanta debacle and De Rossi situation behind him and the team as Roma prepares for a crucial Rome Derby. They need to win to stay in Champions League contention and will be boosted by Francesco Totti's return from suspension. Lazio are still without a host of players but are hoping the Reja incident is behind them as they seek third spot.

Milan travels to Palermo with Ibrahimovic back from his ban, while Nesta should return from injury to replace Mexes. Meanwhile, Juventus are at home to Chievo with Pepe and Vidal out, as is Chievo's leading marksman Sergio Pellissier.

Elsewhere, Udinese will be looking to take advantage of any Lazio slip-up as they host Atalanta, while Inter are seeking a turnaround in fortunes at home against Catania. Bologna hosts Novara, looking to put distance between themselves and the relegation zone as Fiorentina aims to do the same at home to Cesena. In-form Lecce take on road strugglers Genoa, while Siena hosts Cagliari. Finally, Napoli will look to continue their resurgence away at Parma.

Messi Wonder Goal Breaks Simeone's 10 Game Undefeated Record

Viva Espana



Pepe Lopez

A wonderful free kick 9 minutes from time was enough to edge Barcelona an away win at the Vincente Calderon in Madrid.

It was Atletico's first defeat in 11 matches, after being undefeated in 10 matches under new Argentine Coach Diego Simeone. The former Atletico midfielder who won both the Spanish La Liga and Spanish Cup, and was once the most capped Argentine International, has proved himself winning to titles with separate clubs in his native Argentina. Under Diego Simeone, Atletico have been incredibly organised and consistent, a characteristic not seen at the club for over a decade. Despite their loss to Barcelona, the club is just 3 points from a Champions League place, with 14 rounds to go, and advanced to the Round of 16 in the Europa League after eliminating Italian Serie A club Lazio 4-1 on aggregate in the past week.

Despite the evident improvement in performance against Barcelona, where under previous coach Gregorio Manzano, Barcelona defeated the Madrid club 5-0 at the Nou Camp, and unfavorable circumstances in losing star Brazilian midfielder Diego to injury, and Barcelona regaining star midfielder Andres Iniesta, the Atleti club were bitterly disappointed with their 2-1 loss to the World Champion Club.

The disappointment revolves around

some controversial decisions from referee Perez Laso. Including Leo Messi's winning free kick goal.

Atletico Madrid Coach Diego Simeone found the lighter side of the referee's performance in a post match conference; "We're not going to argue if it's a problem with the wall...if Busquets committed a penalty or if Alves should have been dismissed in the second half. The referee was perfect!"

Atletico's Portuguese midfielder Tiago commented; "Some of my team-mates said the referee told them to back up. That's why we ran towards the referee to protest, but he said he didn't. There was a clear handball in the box on Juanfran's shot, but it wasn't called and we're used to this because when we play against the big teams we always get a penalty called against us, but we have to carry on."

Atletico Madrid Striker Radamel Falcao twitter account read; "I think the only person that didn't see Busquet's handball yesterday was the referee. Hmmm, could it be that he really didn't see it?"

Meanwhile match winner, Barcelona's Leo Messi commented in his club's Coach, who has yet to sign a new contract; "I do not know what he (Guardiola) is thinking. We are awaiting the decision he will take. But I hope he stays much longer. It would be best for us. It's a situation he has to think about, though, and every year, he has done the same. On who might replace Guardiola, if he decides to move on; "It is wonderful that things are going so well for Bielsa. I have always said that he is a coach that I like. Many say that he is very similar to Guardiola."

Marcelo Bielsa is coach of Athletic Bilbao, who have advanced to the Spanish Cup Final, and will play against Barcelona.

FOOTBALL BRIEFS

Keita considers Liverpool option

Barcelona midfielder Seydou Keita says he is flattered to be linked with a move to English Premier League club Liverpool.

British sources have suggested Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish is keen to bring Mali international Keita to Anfield when the off-season transfer window opens.

Keita, who joined Barca from Sevilla in 2008, has struggled to hold down a regular spot at Camp Nou this term, making just 14 competitive starts so far in 2011/12.

The former Lens and Lorient midfielder has confirmed he may move to find regular first-team action, and said a switch to Liverpool is an appealing prospect.

"I am flattered by the interest of Liverpool, one of the biggest clubs in the world," Keita was quoted as saying by Sky Sports. "However, let's wait until the end of the season with Barcelona and see what happens."

"I love Barcelona and it is difficult to find a better team than them, but I am ambitious and want to play football week in, week out."

Silva satisfied at City

Manchester City attacker David Silva has declared that he is happy with life at Eastlands.

The Spain international joined City in 2010 in a reported 30-million-euro deal after six years at Valencia, as the La Liga club were forced to sell some of their prized assets to balance their books. After a somewhat slow start to life in England, Silva has become a key member of Roberto Mancini's squad and the 26-year-old is not thinking about leaving anytime soon.

"I was very happy at Valencia, but because of some circumstances I had to leave," he told Onda Cero.

"City were the ones that wanted me the most."

"I am very happy in England, I have two years left on my contract and I want to see it out."

"Right now, I do not want to return (to Spain), I am enjoying life in England, people treat me wonderfully and I want to continue enjoying this."

"Mancini has complete trust in me, which is very important for a player and I am very happy. My team-mates are adapting well to my game and that is very good for me."

Silva then played down reports that Barcelona and Real Madrid were also interested in his services before he moved to England.

"Neither Barca, nor Madrid made any move," he said.

UEFA agree fixture-cutting deal

UEFA and European clubs have reached an agreement to reduce the number of international matches in a year, though FIFA remain opposed to the deal.

The deal foresees the number of double-header matches being cut to nine over a period of two years, despite clubs asking for the current number of 12 per year to be halved.

It also specifies that both matches in double-headers should be played on the same continent and that there will be no international friendlies played in August. However, Europe's football governing body will not be backing the clubs as they attempt to oppose FIFA regarding the timing of the Africa Cup of Nations.

Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, chairman of the European Club Association, stated that the situation with global football governing body FIFA remains "unsatisfactory".

"The agreement with UEFA is a major breakthrough for European club football," Rummenigge said.

"While an agreement has been reached with UEFA, the situation remains unsatisfactory in relation to FIFA."

"Unfortunately, discussions with the FIFA president have failed to lead to a satisfactory outcome which takes account of the clubs' demands."

FIFA, which has the final say on international fixtures, pointed the blame at the ECA in response, claiming the organisation had rejected opportunities to negotiate the matter.

Terry: Knee surgery went well

Chelsea captain John Terry has revealed surgery on his injured right knee went well and is now hoping to be back in action in four to six weeks. The news means Terry's domestic season may not be over and he will almost certainly be ready for the European Championships in the summer should he be selected.

The former England captain initially reported the injury at the turn of the year but played through the pain barrier before accepting the need for medical intervention.

"The operation went well and I'm feeling really good," he told The Sun.

"The surgeon has shaved off a bit of bone in my right knee that was rubbing and causing a lot of swelling."

"We're all confident the operation has solved the problem and it is looking good for a quick return."

Terry has been given an estimated return date by the Chelsea medical staff, but the 31-year-old is hopeful of an even quicker comeback.

"The medical staff say four to six weeks before I can play again. But, hopefully, it might be sooner."

"I'll definitely be back before the end of the season to help the team in the Premier League run-in and for the Euros." Should he be fit within the forecasted four weeks, the defender could take part in Chelsea's last seven games, including crucial trips to Liverpool and Arsenal in the race for fourth place.

Pearce rules himself out of England job

England caretaker manager Stuart Pearce has ruled himself out of the running for the full-time position.

Pearce took charge of his first match as senior England manager on Wednesday, watching his side fall 3-2 against the Netherlands at Wembley. And while Pearce said he enjoyed the experience and would happily lead England to Euro 2012 in June, he said he had no desire to take the job in the long-term.

"I feel I would consider taking the England team to the Euros, without a doubt," Pearce said.

"That wouldn't be daunting to me at all. I have really enjoyed this week. If that opportunity comes along, then great."

"All I am doing is buying the Football Association time if they haven't got someone else in place. The full-time manager of England is someone else at this moment in time, not me."

"I'm in the situation as Under-21 manager and they needed someone to fill in short-term. I am sure they will go through the process of getting someone in place before the summer. If they don't they know they've got me available and all the planning's done."

"We have to have a touch more belief in ourselves. Belief is the missing ingredient that we need to find."

"There were a few good showings from the players, and we've learnt a lot."

"That was the exercise for me going into the game - to learn about one or two individuals and their credentials for the summer and I think we have done that."

can't ask for more. If we had come away 2-2 there would be a better feel about ourselves."

Goals from Gary Cahill and Ashley Cole had seen England fight back from 2-0 down on Wednesday, only to allow a late winner to Arjen Robben in injury time, and Pearce said his team's lack of experience had shone through when it counted.

"A little bit of nous could have seen the game through," he said.

"It is disappointing but the exercise was to learn from it. We came up against an outstanding team with the Robben's and Van Persie's of this world - they are outstanding footballers."

"Team for team and experience for experience with caps, the (Mark) van Bommel's of this world make sure that if someone is breaking on them they don't get away from them. It is game management and knowhow that you have to learn."

"We have to have a touch more belief in ourselves. Belief is the missing ingredient that we need to find."

"There were a few good showings from the players, and we've learnt a lot. That was the exercise for me going into the game - to learn about one or two individuals and their credentials for the summer and I think we have done that."



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ENGLAND EPL



	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts	Last5games Most recent first
1 Manchester City	26	20	3	3	67	19	+48	63	WWLW
2 Manchester United	26	19	4	3	63	26	+37	61	WDWW
3 Tottenham Hotspur	26	16	5	5	51	30	+21	53	LWDW
4 Arsenal	26	14	4	8	53	37	+16	46	WWWD
5 Chelsea	26	13	7	6	47	31	+16	46	WLDD
6 Newcastle United	26	12	7	7	38	38	+0	43	DWWL
7 Liverpool	25	10	9	6	29	23	+6	39	LWDL
8 Norwich City	26	9	8	9	38	43	-5	35	LWLD
9 Sunderland	26	9	6	11	34	30	+4	33	LLWW
10 Everton	25	9	6	10	26	27	-1	33	WDWD
11 Fulham	26	8	9	9	32	36	-4	33	WWLD
12 Stoke City	26	9	6	11	26	38	-12	33	WLLL
13 West Bromwich ...	26	9	5	12	33	35	-2	32	WWLD
14 Swansea City	26	7	9	10	28	34	-6	30	LWDL
15 Aston Villa	26	6	11	9	29	34	-5	29	DLLD
16 Wolverhampton ...	26	5	7	14	30	51	-21	22	DLWL
17 Queens Park Ra...	26	5	6	15	27	45	-18	21	LLDL
18 Blackburn Rovers	26	5	6	15	37	59	-22	21	LWLD
19 Bolton Wanderers	26	6	2	18	29	54	-25	20	LLDW
20 Wigan Athletic	26	4	8	14	23	50	-27	20	DWDLL

SPAIN La Liga



	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts	Last5games Most recent first
1 Real Madrid	24	21	1	2	80	21	+59	64	WWWW
2 Barcelona	24	16	6	2	70	18	+52	54	WWLW
3 Valencia	24	11	7	6	37	29	+8	40	LLWD
4 Levante	24	10	5	9	34	35	-1	35	WLDD
5 Athletic Club	24	8	10	6	39	32	+7	34	DWLW
6 Málaga	24	10	4	10	33	36	-3	34	WLWL
7 Osasuna	24	8	10	6	28	38	-10	34	WLWL
8 Espanyol	24	9	6	9	27	29	-2	33	LDDL
9 Atlético Madrid	24	8	8	8	33	30	+3	32	LDLD
10 Sevilla	24	8	8	8	26	27	-1	32	WWLL
11 Rayo Vallecano	24	9	4	11	32	36	-4	31	LWWL
12 Real Betis	24	9	3	12	28	32	-4	30	DWWL
13 Real Sociedad	24	8	6	10	27	34	-7	30	WLWL
14 Getafe	24	7	8	9	24	31	-7	29	DDLL
15 Mallorca	24	7	7	10	23	29	-6	28	LWLL
16 Granada	24	8	4	12	22	34	-12	28	LWLL
17 Villarreal	24	6	9	9	25	36	-11	27	DLWD
18 Racing Santander	24	4	12	8	19	31	-12	24	DLDD
19 Sporting Gijón	24	5	6	13	22	45	-23	21	DLDD
20 Real Zaragoza	24	3	6	15	19	45	-26	15	LLWL

ITALY Serie A



	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts	Last5games Most recent first
1 Milan	25	15	6	4	49	22	+27	51	DWDWL
2 Juventus	24	13	11	0	37	15	+22	50	DWDW
3 Udinese	25	13	6	6	37	23	+14	45	WDLLW
4 Lazio	25	13	6	6	39	29	+10	45	WLWLW
5 Napoli	25	10	10	5	42	24	+18	40	WWWD
6 Roma	25	11	5	9	38	31	+7	38	LWLDW
7 Internazionale	25	11	3	11	34	34	+0	36	LLLLD
8 Palermo	25	10	4	11	39	39	+0	34	LWLW
9 Catania	24	8	9	7	32	33	-1	33	WLWLW
10 Chievo	25	9	6	10	21	30	-9	33	WWLLW
11 Atalanta	25	9	10	6	30	28	+2	31	DWDWL
12 Cagliari	25	7	10	8	23	26	-3	31	LDWLW
13 Genoa	25	9	4	12	33	46	-13	31	DLLLW
14 Parma	24	7	8	9	29	37	-8	29	DLDWL
15 Fiorentina	24	7	7	10	23	25	-2	28	LLLWW
16 Bologna	24	7	7	10	24	29	-5	28	LWWDD
17 Siena	25	6	8	11	27	28	-1	26	WLWLW
18 Lecce	25	6	6	13	28	40	-12	24	WWDD
19 Novara	25	3	8	14	21	45	-24	17	LDWL
20 Cesena	24	4	4	16	16	38	-22	16	LLLDL

One Game At A Time

France

Sat 3rd March
Dijon v Montpellier
Lille v Auxerre
Olympique Mars... v Toulouse
Nancy v Olympique Lyon
Saint-Étienne v Evian TG
Sochaux v Valenciennes
Bordeaux v Nice

Germany

Sat 3rd March
Bayer Leverkusen v Bayern München
Hamburger SV v Stuttgart
Hannover 96 v Augsburg
Freiburg v Schalke 04
Kaiserslautern v Wolfsburg
Hertha BSC v Werder Bremen
Borussia Dortmund v Mainz 05

Sun 4th March

Nürnberg v Borussia M'gl...
Hoffenheim v Köln

Italy

Sat 3rd March
Palermo v Milan
Juventus v Chievo
Parma v Napoli
Sun 4th March
Udinese v Atalanta
Siena v Cagliari
Fiorentina v Cesena
Lecce v Genoa
Roma v Lazio
Bologna v Novara
Internazionale v Catania

England EPL

Sat 3rd Feb
Liverpool v Arsenal
Blackburn Rovers v Aston Villa
Manchester City v Bolton Wanderers
Queens Park Rangers v Everton
Stoke City v Norwich City
West Bromwich v Chelsea
Wigan Athletic v Swansea City
Newcastle United v Sunderland
Sun 4th Feb
Fulham v Wolverhampton ...
Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester United

The Championship

Fri 2nd Mar
Blackpool v Hull City
Sat 3rd March
Doncaster Rovers v Brighton & Hov...
Millwall v Reading
Crystal Palace v Peterborough U...
Barnsley v Nottingham Forest
Ipswich Town v Bristol City
Watford v Burnley
Leicester City v Coventry City
Birmingham City v Derby County
Portsmouth v Middlesbrough
Leeds United v Southampton

Scotland

Fri 2nd March
Aberdeen v Celtic
Sat 3rd March
Dunfermline At... v Motherwell
Hibernian v St. Mirren
Kilmarnock v St. Johnstone
Rangers v Heart of Midlo...
Mon 5th March
Dundee United v Inverness CT

Greece

Sat 3rd March
Panionios v Atromitos
Atromitos PSTD Doxa Dramas
OFI PSTD Panionios
OFI v Panionios
Xanthi v Panaitolikos
Aris v AEK Athens
Olympiakos Piraeus v PSTD Aris
Sun 4th March
Astros Tripolis v Ergotelis
Levadiakos v Kerkyra
Panaitolikos PSTD Ergotelis
PAS Giannina PSTD Levadiakos

Spain

Sat 3rd March
Mallorca v Osasuna
Getafe v Málaga
Rayo Vallecano v Racing Santander
Barcelona v Sporting Gijón
Sevilla v Atlético Madrid
Real Zaragoza v Villarreal
Sun 4th March
Athletic Club v Real Sociedad
Granada v Valencia
Real Madrid v Espanyol
Mon 5th March
Levante v Real Betis

Holland

Sat 3rd March
ADO Den Haag v Heerenveen
VVV v NAC Breda
RKC Waalwijk v Excelsior
AZ v Heracles
Vitesse v De Graafschap
Sun 4th March
Ajax v Roda JC
Utrecht v NEC
Feyenoord v Groningen
PSV v Twente

Portugal

Fri 2nd March
Benfica v Porto
Sat 3rd March
Nacional v Sp Braga
Vitória Setúbal v Sporting CP
Vitória Guimarães v Marítimo

THE CHAMPIONSHIP



	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts	Last5games Most recent first
1 Southampton	33	18	8	7	61	32	+29	62	WWWDW
2 West Ham United	32	18	7	7	51	32	+19	61	DWDWL
3 Reading	32	17	6	9	41	27	+14	57	WWWW
4 Blackpool	33	15	10	8	56	43	+13	55	WLWDW
5 Birmingham City	32	15	9	8	51	30	+21	54	LWDWD
6 Cardiff City	32	14	11	7	50	39	+11	53	WLLD
7 Brighton & Hov...	33	15	8	10	39	33	+6	53	WDDWW

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